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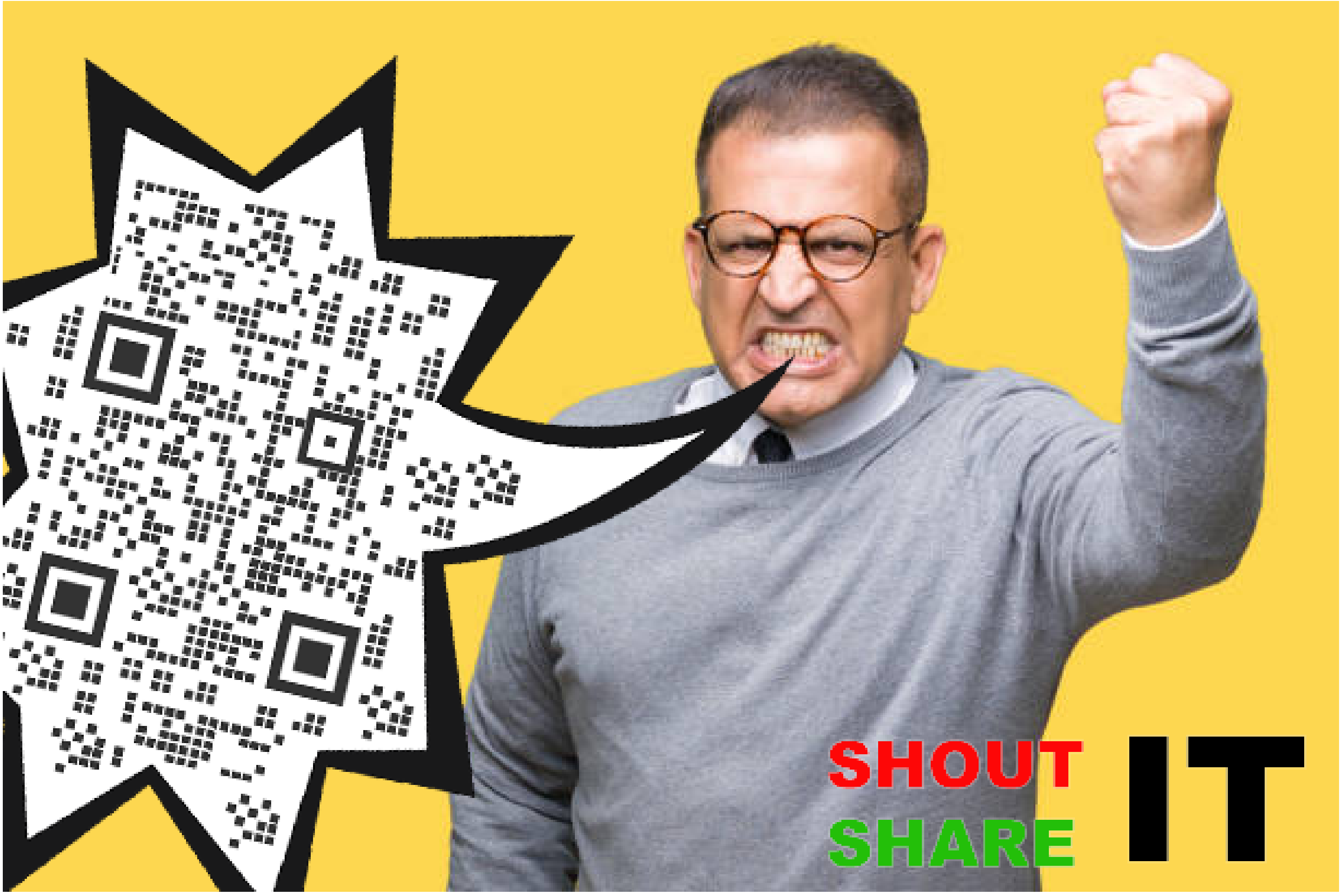
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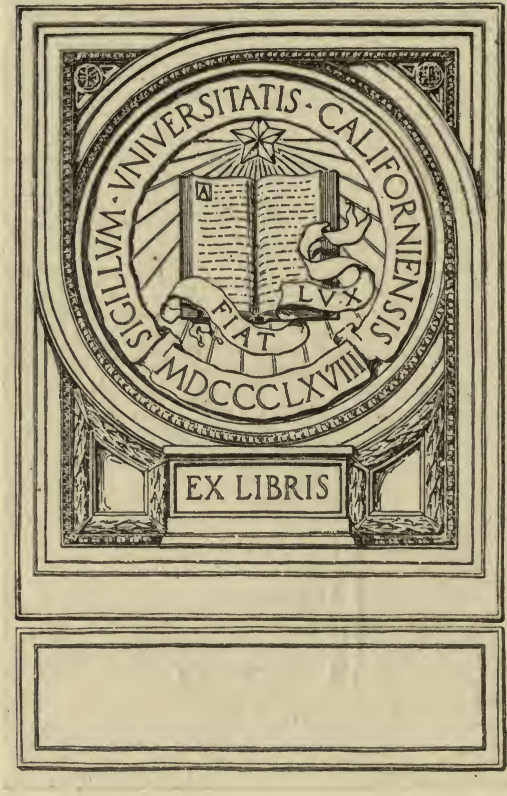

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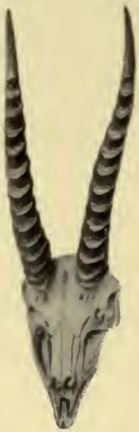

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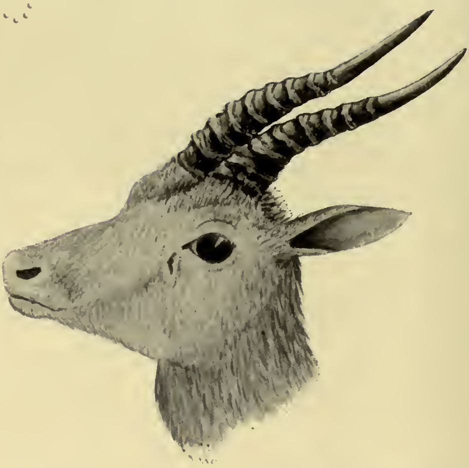
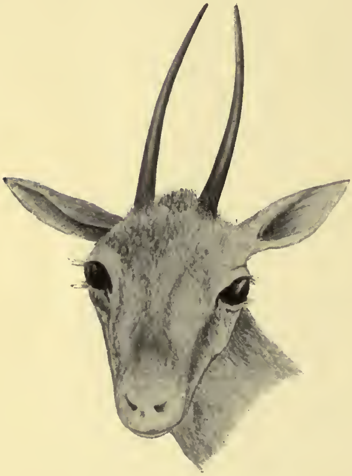
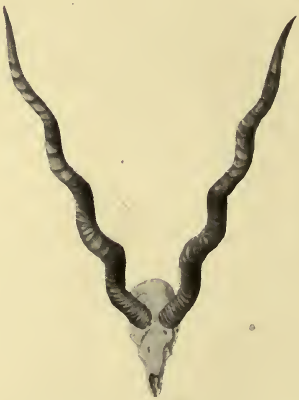


HEAD OF BUCK CHINKARA OR INDIAN GAZELLE



HEAD OF DOE CHINKARA



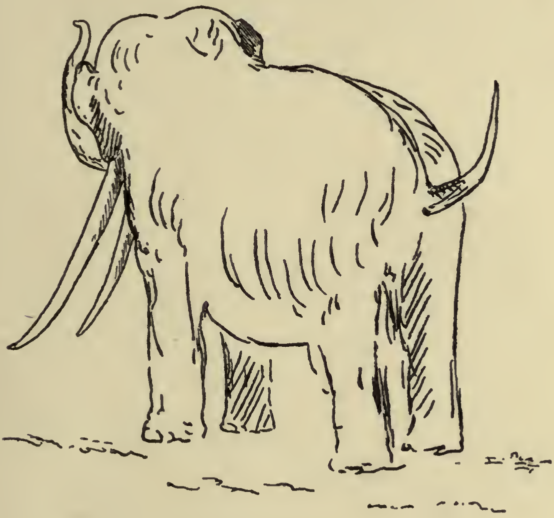
HORNS OF BLACK BUCK

JUNGLE BY-WAYS : : IN INDIA : :

LEAVES FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF A SPORTSMAN AND A NATURALIST

BY E. P. STEBBING, I.F.S., F.R.G.S., F.Z.S.

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE AUTHOR AND OTHERS



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DEDICATED BY PERMISSION
TO THAT GOOD SPORTSMAN
HIS EXCELLENCY
THE EARL OF MINTO
G.C.M.G., G.M.S.I., G.M.I.E., P.C., ETC.
VICEROY AND GOVERNOR-GENERAL
OF INDIA

252503

PREFACE

"JUNGLE By-Ways in India," as the title implies, deals with the great jungle tracts of Hindustan, and with the animal life they contain—the animal life, that is, as known to the Shikari man. The observations and incidents related, and the materials for the rough sketches in the text, are extracted from notes kept in the diaries which are the outcome of sixteen pleasant and interesting years spent in the Indian Forest Service. What merit these sketches, from both pen and pencil, may possess must be sought for in that atmosphere which breathes through accounts of incidents set down at the time of their occurrence, or immediately after—an atmosphere which, as I believe, is to be only attained in this manner.

Preface

The Forest Officer in India, whilst engaged upon his ordinary routine duties, has what may be considered unique opportunities for observing and studying the animal life of the great forests and jungles which he administers. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a profession affording greater interest in its daily avocations, whilst yielding at the same time greater facilities for the enjoyment of first-class sport amongst both large and small game. And, as such, the Forest Service of India can be commended to all young Britons possessed of a love of science, a love of natural history, and a love of sport.

It is an experience common to many true sportsmen, I believe, that they soon grow tired of the mere slaughter of the animals they go out to seek. Gradually the fascination of the jungle lays its hold upon them, and of the jungle-loving denizens. It becomes a pastime of absorbing interest to watch the life of the jungle in its daily round from early morn to dewy eve, and again in the solemn watches of the night. It becomes an ambition to learn from, and strive to emulate, the jungle man in his knowledge of all jungle lore, and to strive to pick up some of his marvellous tracking powers. Long years of close study, combined with an exceptional aptitude for absorbing jungle lore, must be passed through before one can hope to even approach the powers in this respect of the jungle man. But what a store of glorious memories do such years contain! From such a store I have endeavoured to depict the fund of pleasure, interest, and knowledge, let alone that breezy spice of danger which adds zest to all sport, which await the student of jungle life in the shimmering East.

I should like to add a word about the sketches of the tracks of the various animals dealt with. These sketches were commenced in India a couple of years ago, but I was, unfortunately, unable to complete the whole series. That I have been able to do so I owe to the courtesy of Mr. R. I. Pocock, Superintendent of the London Zoological Gardens, who placed at my disposal every possible facility at his fine gardens. Unfortunately, London does not possess an Indian Bison (Gaur). My thanks are due to the Director of the Berlin Zoological Gardens for some beautiful drawings, which enabled me to check and improve my own. I know of no other work where the 'tracks' of Indian game-animals have been dealt with. Rough as are my sketches, I am in hopes, therefore, that they may prove of use to brother shikaris.

I would acknowledge my indebtedness to that excellent little book, *The Indian Field Shikar Book*, by W. S. Burke, for some of my notes relative to size of heads, weight of animals, etc. Where I have used my own records and notes, I have checked them with his.

To His Excellency the Viceroy, Lord Minto, my sincere thanks are due for the kindly courtesy which has permitted a brother sportsman to dedicate these memories of the Indian Jungles to himself.

To my Wife, and to Capt. H. Willis, of the 29th Lancers, my thanks are due for the use of the photographs in the plates; and to Mr. W. C. Fasson, Deputy-Inspector-General of Police, Bengal, for two original plates depicting bison incidents in the Chota Nagpur jungles.

Finally, I offer my grateful acknowledgments to my Publishers for their unwearying courtesy and the unsparing efforts they have taken to produce the book in its present pleasing form: for the outward appearance, at least, will, I feel sure, appeal to all.

E. P. S.

INTRODUCTION

OFF TO THE JUNGLES

IT is considered quite one of the London sights to visit one of the great railway termini for the North, just before the opening of the festival of St. Grouse, and see the sportsmen off to the moors. Truly it is a heart-inspiring if commandment-breaking sight for those not going themselves. The medley of eager sportsmen and their not less obtrusive friends or would-be friends; the keen, clear-eyed porter with visions of the good tip; the deferential platform inspectors and guards in their neat, well-kept uniforms, and the chaotic mass of smart leathern trunks, dressing-cases, kit-bags, immaculate gun-cases and, last but not least, dogs, forms to all appearance an inextricable confusion. Were not one's experience all to the contrary, one would think it hopeless to expect anyone to get the mass disintegrated and safely housed before the fateful second on which the giant north-bound express will draw out of the station with scarce a sound to show that she has begun her great rush towards the Moors.

Would not some of these beautifully tailored and outfitted sportsmen open their eyes somewhat if they could see the Anglo-Indian shikari off to the jungles on six to eight weeks' leave, or better still, coming back from them. It is a sight to be commonly met with on the platforms of the great up-country junctions in India, and most plentiful in—of all seasons—the hot weather, and is one particularly characteristic of the race. The temperature may be ranging at anything from 100 to 120 in the shade; not exactly a time, one would think, when one would take unnecessary railway journeys or rough it out in camp in tiny tents, spending hours tramping about in the hot Indian sun. But what do we see on the platforms? Of course the home-goer, the lucky furlough man and his appurtenances, are only too visible for two days in each week during April—May, mail day and the day before. We are well used to the lofty pitying look they cast on us who are only ‘for the jungles’ this year, but what care we? Next year, or the year after, we shall be occupying their position. Now we are all intent on the jungles and the glorious free life they have in store for us.

Sitting in one of the usual railway refreshment (save the mark!) rooms so liberally provided for the travelling public, I was seriously engaged in making up my mind as to whether to try this time the *ifeesh* with a queer blacky-brown sauce to it; the everlasting *ichop*, tough as blazes, and floating in dirty coloured gravy; the equally inevitable ‘bacon-egg,’ the former like bits of leather soaked in rancid fat, the latter of the most doubtful freshness; or that *pièce de résistance* (in more senses than one) of the East, the vegetable and mutton (or goat) curry which is apt to prolong reminiscences of breakfast to an undue length throughout the day if partaken of at all freely. With heavily knit brows I endeavoured to make a choice, and it was perhaps a memory of the breakfast-room at some of our great London termini which brought to my mind the festival of St. Grouse as I saw a train rumble slowly in to the platform in front of me. A couple of agile youngsters in khaki, subalterns obviously, tanned and burnt brick-red by the days of exposure to the hot-weather sun, sprang from a second-class carriage (all the rupees are wanted for the expenses of the shoot, and are not to be unnecessarily wasted on luxuries in mere travelling), their open faces bearing a look of mixed gloom and joy. Gloom that the six weeks' outing is over, and that they have to return to the amenities of civilized life. It is true that they will now see a punkha or fan again, will be able to drink deep in iced drinks, and see once again a bridge table. No further delights, for that stunning girl with the grey-blue eyes and glorious golden hair has flitted to the hills!

But what are all these in comparison to the untrammelled freedom of the jungles, even with the temperature at 200 and only a tiny *pal* tent to ward off the fierce rays?

The joy and pride on their faces is for the bundle of horns which they carefully see lifted out of their carriage, together with several old battered leather rifle and gun-cases.

A couple of leathern trunks and two rolls of bedding, water-bottles, a wooden store box, and an old shikar topi or two with sticks, and an open deal case of soda-water bottles with a lump of ice sticking on top of them, the latter luxury picked up since they joined the railway, for assuredly no ice, or soda either probably, did they see or burden themselves with in camp. On looking on this battered collection of kit, your eye will run critically over the horns. Not much, perhaps, will be your verdict. Nothing big. No, there may be no record heads. But to their proud possessors, the result of this one of the forerunners of many glorious shoots, that little pile of horns represents hours of patient toil and tramp, hours of discomfort through the long hot day when the flies nearly drove one mad, and the heat temperature went up and up and up, until you felt as if you would never and could never get cool again, nor ever get rid of the thirst which assailed and tempted you to drink and drink and drink to the detriment of fitness and shooting capabilities. Having taken in the well-known collection of kit that one expected to find issue from the sahib's compartment, the eye wandered down to the third-class carriages and soon alighted on the rest of the party. A servant, black-bearded and fierce-moustached with fine features, evidently an up-country man by face and figure, was engaged in extracting from the interior of the carriage, with the help of a couple of orderlies in khaki shikar kit, and a number of clothesless station coolies in their usual deshabille, a mass which, often as one has seen it, is ever apt to startle and appal one with its heterogeneous character and the talent, for it can be nothing else, which the native displays for making one's kit look as awful and disreputable as it possibly can. It is bad enough on an ordinary railway journey which is to terminate in a visit to friends when your bearer persists in carrying your best topi and straw hat wrapped up in a towel, and your boots and half your clothing in your bedding roll (which thus assumes mammoth proportions), and so on. But, ye gods, when it is a shikar expedition! It is then that your servants appear in their full glory, their devilish ingenuity is exercised up to the hilt, and it requires the experienced eye of the Anglo-Indian shikari to make out the uses of even a tithe of what the carriage is now disgorging on to the platform before the eyes of that astonished railway official, who seems to remember that there is a rule somewhere about weighing luggage. If there be, it is quite disregarded by our young shikaring subalterns, who stroll up serenely to see how it goes with the rest of the kit. Two rolls of khaki cloth (how lovingly they look at them!) are their little tents, the happy home of the happy, happy past six weeks. A couple of green rolls consist of a canvas tub, chair, basin, and table. A gunny bag fastened at an end contains the low fold-up bedstead. Tent poles, tied with a bit of jungle fibre cut from the nearest scrub when the poles were last and finally bound together, are pitched out. Then follow the weirdest collection of paraphernalia: servants' bedding and brass lotahs, cooking-pots, kerosine-tins for the sahib's hot bath water, baskets containing a variety collection of odds and ends; two wretched murghis in a small wicker cage with legs tied together, but who with admirable presence of mind as soon as they reach the platform with a bump push out their heads and commence to search for stray grains of seeds. Of a size of a large pigeon are these Indian fowls, and with as much taste and succulence in them as a piece of wash-leather ; but still they appear to serve to keep life in the sahib somehow, for in many parts they practically form his sole meat, they and a piece of tough old goat now and then, whose flesh is to murghi flesh as is wash-leather to rhinoceros hide.

My eyes move from the eager fowls to see a great bundle of skins, the sahib's trophies, issue forth from the carriage door, being reverently handed from one orderly to the other. Here, again, the uninitiated would exclaim in horror at there being anything worth looking at. The bundle resembles any other bundle of old dried smelling skins one has seen going to a tannery at home. Yes, to the uninitiated I admit it is so, but to the shikari, no. To him the bundle is worth a stroll on to the platform to inspect, and a casual question to one of the orderlies as to where the sahibs have been to have secured such handsome trophies as the result of their straight shooting and their orderly's keenness. Smart to the salute comes the orderly, as with a grin spreading slowly across the wide broad face till it disappears into the pugri, covering an ear on each side, he names the jungle and descants on the skins, swelling with pride. Now we note a bundle of odd horns, sambhar, chitul, barasingha, and drop a word of congratulation on their keen sight, for these are newly dropped horns picked up in the jungle by the orderlies or native guides when on their shikar outings.

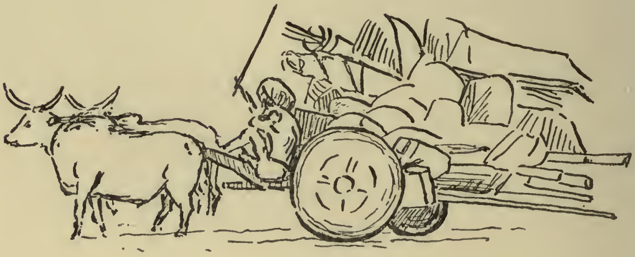
The value of these shed horns, which are annually collected by the natives and disposed of for a few annas in the bazaars, is probably considerable, though I have never heard of any figures having been drawn up to show it. As we shall see, the various deer shed their horns in the hot-weather months. It is, however, unusual to find more than a stray horn in the jungle in areas where deer are numerous, and this absence of shed horns can but point to the careful search and systematical collection made of them by the neighbouring inhabitants of the tracts inhabited by the beasts, or by the jungle races of the country who live in and roam over the forests year in and year out.

At last the carriage has disgorged its eye-startling contents, and the horns and skins and rifle and gun-cases are piled on to one of those gharis variously called *ticca* gharis, or plague boxes, which form our hansom in the East. The gharry itself is in the last stage of dilapidation, though it proudly bears a 'I' on it and calls itself first-class ; the ponies or tats are of the smallest dimensions and of the sorriest description, and the harness is a collection of rotten leather straps kept together by still rottener string. However, the youngsters climb in and drive off to rejoin and show their spoil. A patient bullock-cart then moves up as if time was no object, and did not exist—but this is the way of the East, and we all have to fall into line with it ! I, for instance, am philosophically waiting a train which has never yet been known to come in within five hours of the advertised time, so the inspector tells me with a leer. The servants and orderlies are for once in a hurry, however. They want to get home now they are so near. The heterogeneous mass of objects is piled into the gharry amidst execrations on the part of each individual assister in the performance, and at the end of ten minutes' pandemonium off goes the rest of the "kit"; to the accompaniment of a dull rattle as the kerosine-tins bump against the near wheel as it crawls slowly round, whilst the end of a tent pole grinding against the off one emits a direful shriek. The kit is off.

We can imagine the sniff of contempt of our immaculate home sportsmen ! And yet the experienced know that with that kit and by means of it those youngsters have had far finer sport than money could purchase in the Old Country, whilst that brawny servant with a couple of stones and a hole in the ground will and often in the past has turned out a dinner which, to a hungry sportsman, be he prince or subaltern, is all that can be desired.

The London cabby too. He is a facetious man.

It would be interesting to hear him on the ticca-walla of the East! Even more so perhaps to ask him to load up the "kit" of an Anglo-Indian shikari!



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PART I

ANTLERS

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CHAPTER I

Shooting in Northern India jungles—The Christmas shooting camp—The denizens of the jungle—Beautiful scenery—A sportsman's paradise—The 'Jungle Eye'—Grass jungle and tree forest—Chitul, pig and sambhar—Elephant's dislike of pig—Kakar and black buck—Dislike of buck for elephants—A lucky shot—Shooting off an elephant—Bees and ant worries—Life in the upper forest.

SHOOTING IN NORTHERN INDIA JUNGLES

TO those of us who have enjoyed the free and easy life of a Christmas shooting camp in the jungles of Northern India, how happy are the memories conjured up by reminiscences of the days spent out in the long grass or high forest beating on elephant or afoot for large and small game.

The jungles of which I am writing hold a variety of some of the most interesting animals of the Asiatic Fauna. The heavy but active sambhar (*Cervus unicolor*), the lumbering awkward nilgai (*Portax pictus*), so unlike one's conceived notions of an antelope, the beautiful and graceful spotted deer (*Cervus axis*) or chitul, as it is called up here, the *para* or hog deer (*Cervus porcinus*), and the wonderfully built little black buck (*Antilope cervicapra*), which inhabit the open cultivated plains and are only to be found in the outer fringes of the thick forest. To these must be added the tiny four-horned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*) and the red-coloured barking deer (*Cervulus muntjac*), locally called kakar, and known in Southern India as the jungle sheep.

In some parts one can also include in the above list the glorious antlered barasingha, or swamp deer (*Cervus duvaucelli*), to secure a heavy fourteen-pointer of which is and must ever be the ambition and aim of every sportsman who has once come across this beautiful deer.

All the above species of the deer and antelope tribes may appear on the scene in a day's beating in these jungles, and at the close of the beats one may find oneself bemoaning one's ill-luck, anathematizing one's bad shooting, or congratulating oneself on having held straight and secured a fine stag or buck of any one or more of them.

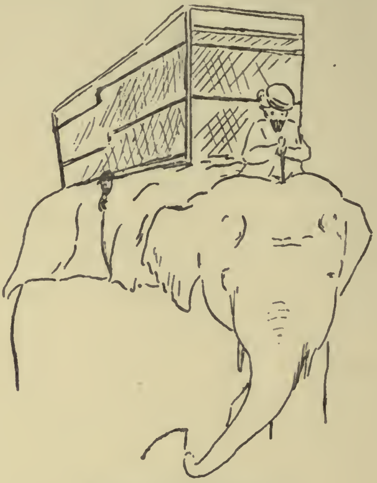
And of course there is always in these jungles, and more especially in the grass jungles, the added spice of excitement in the knowledge that there is an off-chance of our coming across 'stripes' or 'spots,' as the shikaring man affectionately designates the two animals he ever most wishes to meet—the tiger, Lord of the Jungles, and the leopard or panther, wiliest and craftiest of animals.

But is it only the memory of the animals killed or the sport enjoyed which grips us so fast as we look back ? We think not !

Visions of the beautiful scenery, some of the most beautiful in the world, amongst which it is pursued, have added so much to its zest and enjoyment.

Up here in the North the climate at Christmas-time (minus the Christmas rains, *bien entendu*) could scarcely be beaten anywhere. The air is sharp and keen, and the atmosphere of a most wonderful brilliant crystal brightness. To the north and east in the pure air rears up the giant Himalayan Chain, the mountains scarcely ten miles distant and looking as if one could throw a biscuit on to them. At their feet rise the tumbling mass of foot-hills, clothed in brilliant green sál (*Shorea robusta*) forest ; whilst stretching towards us from this green belt is a wilderness of giant grass land interspersed with thickets and copses of shisham (*Dalbergia Sissoo*) and khair (*Acacia Catechu*), both now leafless. Tongues of green sál forest run out from the main belt to the north, whilst a dark green line behind us indicates where the forest region recommences in the Siwalik

Hills. Running generally north and south and cutting wide white scars through hill and plain forest are the watercourses or *raos* as they are termed locally, which, from narrow ravines and deep gorges in the mountains, broaden out into wide stony river-beds as soon as the slope becomes more level on leaving the hills. Save in the rains these are mostly dry, or have a small stream flowing down one part of the wide bed. The rest is given over to tall elephant grass patches and the aforesaid copses —both affording a grand shelter to game of all sorts.



A Howdah Elephant.

Thus in this ideal sportsmen's paradise you may beat on elephants or afoot through high forest or tall elephant grass, or through dense brakes and thickets of thorny trees and shrubs ; or again—best sport of all—stalk the old sambhar up on the crests and saddle backs of the foot hills—a pastime you will find it difficult to beat.

FROM THE HOWDAH AND PAD

There are many worse ways of seeing the jungle than from the howdah or pad of an elephant—preferably the latter when one is only intent on a morning or evening stroll.

Personally from choice I prefer my own flat feet and a good shikari guide, and by good I mean one who will not treat one as a ' passenger ' the whole time till he places one in front of the beast to be shot. One can do that kind of thing on the range just as satisfactorily ! I know there are men who consider ' shooting ' to consist of merely bowling over the animal when they have been brought up to it by their tracker. I prefer to think—and really do think—that such men are the exceptions. They do not fall within the category of shikari. For a sportsman to be a true shikari he must take a personal interest in the methods by which his tracker is taking him up to the game, must endeavour to acquire the ' jungle eye ' and take a real interest in wood craft, and all that is understood by our English term ' venery.'

And this knowledge and jungle lore can ever be better acquired on one's own feet than from the howdah or pad of an elephant.

There are, however, extensive high grass jungles in India, in Northern India and Assam, for instance, where if one wishes to obtain sport it has to be from the top of an elephant, and many of us can look back to many pleasant hours passed on the pad in company with a keen mahout and staunch elephant.

At all times is the grass jungle and tree forest beautiful under such conditions. At the end of the monsoon, whilst the grass jungle is still very high and dense, but few and very rapid glimpses of the numerous animals it contains can be obtained. But what a wonderful sight is this grass! Each great clump of slender stems shoots up from a centre and droops over in a graceful curve at a height of some fifteen feet or more, whilst straight up from their midst rear the beautiful flower heads, a delicate nodding mass of pink and yellow pendulous feathery tassels. Like some vast and giant garden is the grass jungle at this period and very beautiful to be out in. With life it positively swarms and teems.

At every stride of the elephant, pea-fowl with their gorgeous plumage, jungle-fowl, many of them brilliantly coloured knowing old cocks, partridges, grey and black, and quail of several kinds get up and offer most tempting shots.

Or again in the high forest the trees, so far as their foliage goes, are seen at their best perhaps after the long rains, whilst great creepers hang down in giant festoons, flinging themselves from

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SCENERY IN THE *RAO* BEDS IN THE SIWALIKS, NORTH INDIA

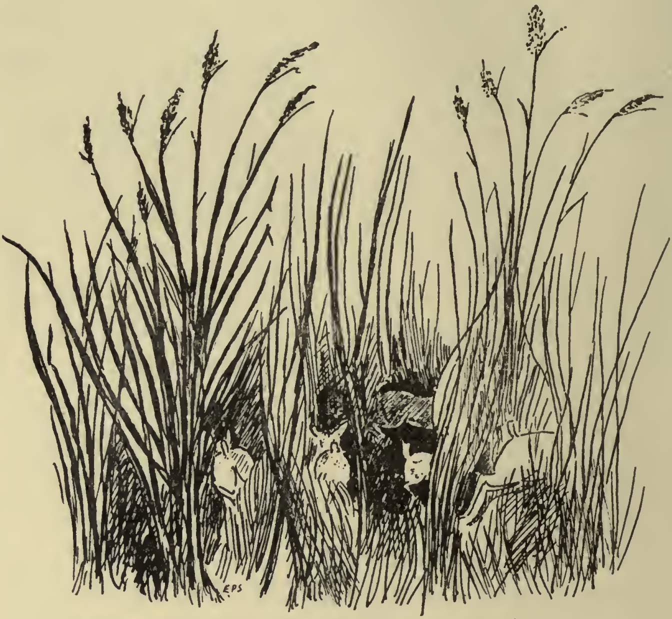
tree to tree, and orchids and delicate ferns cling to stem and branch ; and down below, the forest floor is hidden by the dense matted undergrowth of the rains, in which disports itself, safe at this season from our gaze and rifle, the four-footed life of the forest.

There is something about these wanderings on an elephant at all seasons of the year, and especially of the shooting year, which sends a thrill through one as the mind looks back at them.

One sees the jungle with such a different eye from the lofty perch, and learns to notice objects and animal life which are quite lost to one whilst on the ground.

Animals, too, are seen at such a different perspective from the pad and appear so very and surprisingly small in the tall grass jungle.

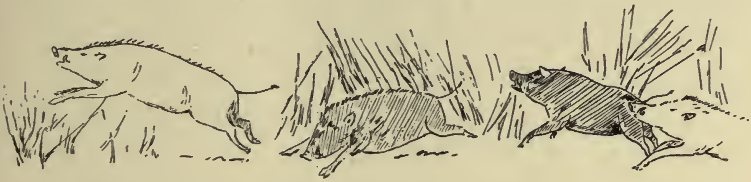
As one sways slowly along, sitting, if on a pad, up behind the mahout with legs straddled down on either side, there is a rustle in the grass and suddenly a herd of chitul go skipping away in front, only their heads and backs and white scuts appearing in the upper grass as they reach the top of their bounds. Or a heavy rush proclaims something larger, and ere the rifle is at the shoulder a dark patch going at full tilt has appeared and disappeared—a sambhar, frightened unfortunately and gone never to be seen again that day. Farther on, a sudden chorus of grunts and squeaks proclaims a sounder of pig and for a moment the jungle appears alive with them, the grass waves in frantic commotion, and the elephant, hastily coiling his trunk, backs quickly and unevenly—for he loathes piggy in all his forms. Not a sign can we see of one of them. They disappear in a most mysterious fashion. Go forward and beat them up, and you may hunt for half an hour in a dense shrubby thicket of no particular size into which you were certain that at least half the sounder went, but not a sign will you see. It is little short of astonishing, and has probably puzzled many generations of us, how pig manage



A herd of Chitul go skipping away in the long grass.

to disappear in this silent manner in grass or copse jungle.

They go right away, and yet after the first rush there is no gradual *diminuendo* of crashing bushes or crackling grass which distinguishes the retreat of most of our four-footed game. One may come suddenly on an old boar or a sow with a baker's dozen of youngsters. For a moment all is turmoil both below and above, for the elephant almost invariably proclaims his disgust and dissatisfaction at the proceeding, often with a shrill trumpet (is it the Mahomedan mahout, one wonders, who has taught his elephant to hate the unclean ?), and then silence and a total disappearance !



A chorus of grunts and squeaks proclaims a sounder of pig.

Farther on in a more open jungle we come upon another herd of chitul, their brilliant fawn-coloured skins with the prominent white spots so harmonizing with their surroundings that they by no means stand out in the startling fashion one might expect from having seen specimens in Zoos or in books. As we approach, the herd take no notice of the elephant save to glance up at and watch it in curiosity as it passes, and the same is the case with the four sambhar does with two youngsters at heel whom we come upon soon after, save that they edge slightly away at an angle as we approach. There is no sign of fear, however, for they do not look high enough to perceive us on its back. The elephant is a thing they are accustomed to meet in the jungles, which is his home as well as theirs, and they appear to quite easily distinguish between the noise he makes in swaying and rustling and breaking his way through the forest or grass, loud though it may be, and the much less loud but blundering noise made in the long grass or over dry leaves and twigs by the civilized man of the cities.

All the jungle denizens can 'spot' our approach a couple of hundred yards or more away, unless we with patience and great trouble learn to follow the example of the men born and bred to the jungles. Take, for instance, the aborigines in Central India and the Gurkha as two examples. Either can glide through the forest in almost as stealthy a manner as the tiger and panther themselves.

These latter animals, by the way, might be come across on an evening stroll on the elephant.

Some men's luck is good in this respect. My own has not been, save on two occasions to be related elsewhere. Should these the most interesting of wild life be thus met accidentally, if you withhold your fire you will not improbably learn a great deal about their ways by watching them, for the chances are they will take little notice of the elephant, and will not look up high enough to spot you on its back.

In long grass you can have great sport and very pretty shooting with the little hog deer, an animal so like a sambhar *en miniature*. He will get up close to the elephant and go jumping through the grass, often breaking back and giving one a difficult shot with one's body screwed round at an angle. He is a lover of the open tall grass areas, and has to be sought there. As we shall see later, he can also be stalked out on those lovely open grassy maidans or savannahs which are to be found amid the sál forests.

The little red barking deer or kakar, whose presence is always swiftly and annoyingly proclaimed by a series of short sharp barks the moment it is frightened, is come across in the tree forest; he offers a small bull's-eye for the rifle and is by no means so easily shot from the pad as the larger animals.

In our slow onward progress we come to a small village footpath, and as the elephant puts her forefoot out towards the path a small hare who had been squatting in his form under a grass tussock jumps up and bolts along the path. We were lolling easily in the front position behind the mahout, and the jump the *hathi* gave nearly sent us out sideways from the great saddle. It is curious how a mighty beast like an elephant, who will face tiger with intrepidity and coolness, loathes small animals, especially snappy dogs and hares and suchlike small fry who, getting up at or playing around the feet, upset for quite a time the equanimity and serenity of its temper.

We are now approaching cultivated lands, and so keep a look out for black buck. Have you ever noticed what a strong instinctive dislike black buck have for elephants ?

It is curious, but many mahouts will tell you that it is a fact. I remember an occasion when on several evenings in the course of a fortnight I tried to approach a small herd of these little animals on the elephant. A habit of theirs is to always live in the same area or tract of country, usually quite a small one, so that it is not difficult to find a herd you have once marked down. Time after time the tale was always the same. I arrived on the edge of the jungle to see the antelope going full speed across the open cultivation beyond and well beyond a decent range. The patch of jungle, though a couple of miles long, was nowhere more than 300–400 yards across and thinned out at the end to about 50 yards breadth. The animals could easily have broken out at the sides, but each evening they kept in the forest until it ended, and then went away full tilt.

I changed my plan of campaign. One evening, leaving the elephant to come through the jungle, I took up my position on foot at the far edge of the forest. Sure enough, on three evenings out of five the herd came out in front of me. The elephant made but little noise as she slowly walked through the patch of forest—quite open forest and grass at this end—but it was enough to bring out the herd, so little do they like elephants. There was a decent head amongst them, but I nearly lost it. It was on the fifth evening that I made up my mind to fire at him, as I had watched their manœuvres sufficiently for my purpose. That evening, instead of bounding out of the jungle with those astonishing leaps of theirs within 15-20 yards of me, they came out at the extreme far edge of the forest, and the buck was 200 yards away before I got a sight on to him. He went away another 300 at racing pace, and then dropped suddenly in a field. The cultivation was quite open and flat, with no hedges or grass, and we watched him the whole way. It was a lucky shot at the distance.

Both howdah and pad-work require some practice, for one has to help the mahout a good deal in warding off branches and in keeping an eye on the look out for thorny brakes, which are apt otherwise to claw and scratch the face and hands and catch and rip up the clothing. If sitting sideways on a pad, one has to look after one's feet, for an elephant is apt to forget that its rider's feet project beyond the pad, and it is no joke having your foot squashed between the pad and a tree trunk. Great circumspection has also *ever* to be paid to the rifles. One will probably be at full cock, and carelessness in this respect in the howdah or on the pad is unpardonable.

Shooting from the howdah or pad is also an art which has to be learnt, as the novice will find that he is always apt to fire *over* the animal at first. In snap-shooting one has also to instinctively allow for the fact that the elephant is on the move.

Minor worries on an elephant, which sometimes assume the proportions of major ones, are due to insects. In Northern India jungles you must always keep in remembrance the big bee (*Apis dorsata*). It is not uncommon for the elephant to blunder in to one of the great combs attached by this bee to the under side of some branch or inclined tree stem in a dense thicket. The bees will be out on you like a knife when disturbed in this fashion, and nothing but immediately rolling yourself up in a blanket, which it is wise to carry, will avoid bad stings.

That vicious brute the red ant (*Œcophylla smaragdina*) has also to be borne in mind. He builds nests made of green leaves stuck together up in the trees, and one is apt to knock against them and get a shower of ants over the exposed portions of the body before one has realized what is the matter. A clean and hurried strip is then the only way to get rid of them, and this must be done promptly, for their nips are most painful.

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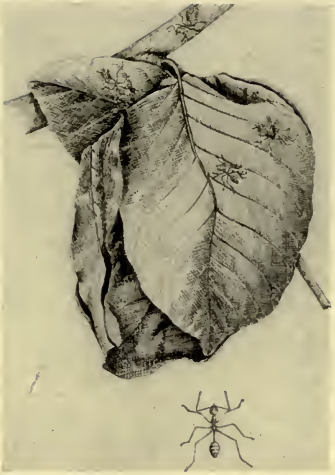
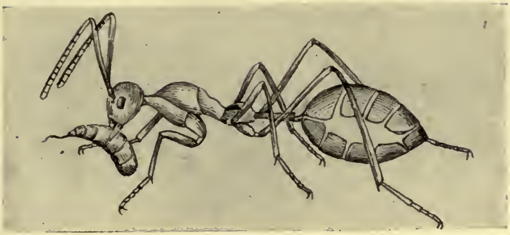
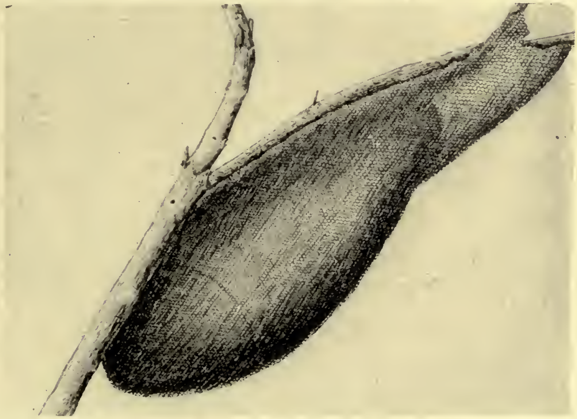


THE FIERCE RED ANT AND HIS HOME OF LEAVES



WORKER RED ANT (ENLARGED) CARRYING GRUB (AFTER GREEN)



COMB OF THE LARGE INDIAN BEE ATTACHED TO A BRANCH

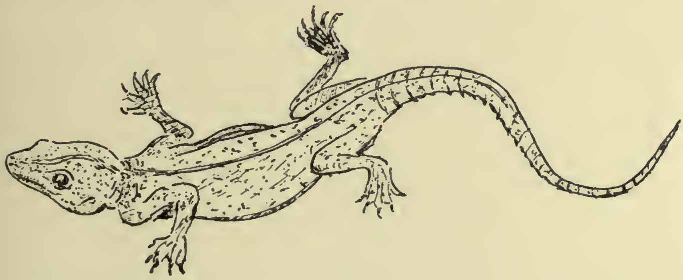
But with the disagreeable there is also much of interest living up above in the leaf canopy.

Have you ever paid any attention to the life which has its being up there ?

Birds there are in numbers. The nesting places in old dry tree stems of the brightly-coloured, shy woodpecker can sometimes be examined from your high seat, and the ways of those curious, ungainly-looking crossbills.

Insect life too is plentiful, and quite apart from that commonly met with down below. Weird-shaped and curiously coloured caterpillars you will meet ; queer mantis and stick insects also, if you keep your eyes open ; moths of shades approximating almost exactly to the bark, twig, or leaf upon which they are sitting, and tree-bugs and beetles, whose colouring and shapes are legion ; and last, but not least, preying upon this infinite variety of life, lizards of all sorts and sizes.

Snakes too ! You may come across a few species who live in trees and bushes, such as the beautiful green bamboo snake.



CHAPTER II

Beating in Northern India jungles—How to beat—Off for a day's beating—A blue bull—Shooting before the beat starts—The beat commences—A herd of Chitul—Pig—Wiliness of the old peacock—Jungle fowl—A sambhar stag—Wariness of the old stags—The stag breaks out—Death of the stag—The lunch carrier—Social amenities.

BEATING IN NORTHERN INDIA JUNGLES

IN the absence of a sufficiency of elephants, that ever difficult question, the greater portion of our Christmas shoot will be devoted to beating the patches of forest and long grass in a systematic sequence. A great deal depends upon the way this is done, and a knowledge of the country and of the habits of the game are absolutely essential if success is to be attained. In every jungle there are certain points to which animals will break naturally, others to which they may be *made* to break by good beating, whilst there are some directions in which no amount of good beating will succeed in bringing the game up to the guns. One and all will break back through the beaters. Once a little jungle lore has been assimilated, this becomes so evident that it is a source of never-ending surprise to see the number of times this simple law is violated. Some strong-minded but utterly ignorant sportsman (save the mark !) will insist, perhaps because his seniority gives him the power to claim the right, on running the whole of the beats himself, with the only too natural result of a practically blank bag.

What memories those days, beating in the beautiful jungles of Northern India, conjure up! After a substantial chotahazri, or breakfast, we set off in the brilliant crystal brightness of the early dawn. The air is keen and piercing and like champagne, blowing straight from the snows on the great Himalayan Chain which towers up so near in the clear atmosphere.

The first beat is some two miles away, and before climbing up on to the pad-elephant or into the dog-cart or on to the pony, one pulls on one's thickest English sweater, and may add a motor-coat if the elephant or dog-cart is our fate.

And even then, whilst swaying along on the elephant to the beat, you will find it chilly enough. And cold will it be for the first hour or two, sitting in one's stand and silently waiting for what fortune will send. Not till the sun has topped yonder mountain-spur at about 8.30 shall we get much warmth into our bones. From then onwards, however, till its decline in the soft, rosy, pale-tinted sky of the cold-weather evening, the temperature will be glorious—the finest that can be found anywhere.

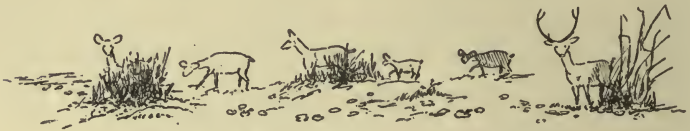
One sits silently in the broad, stony river-bed, in which the guns have been placed at intervals of about 100 yards or so apart, and patiently awaits the distant voices of the beaters to commence the business of the day. Often during these waits in the early morning may be seen evidences of the game one has come in search of.

At times a rattle of stones or soft pattering behind proclaims that, all unbeaten, game is afoot in the forest and is on the trek back to some well-known, shady, secluded retreat, in which the warm hours of the winter day will be passed in a lazy, somnolent peace. Without a movement of the body the head is slowly turned to see what is happening, and there in Indian file away to the right is a small herd of chitul. Following one another in a somewhat straggling Indian file, they come out of the jungle, though each will usually walk exactly in the tracks of its predecessor. As is often the case at this time of the year the herd consists entirely of does, and they trot across the *rao* bed one behind the other, with scarce a glance to either side save only the leader—an old experienced doe, who keeps her eyes on the *qui vive* whilst in such an open exposed position.

Closely following this herd we saw the other day a nilgai, or blue bull, come out of the jungle behind and go lumbering across the stony nullah bed with that peculiar, awkward, shambling stride these animals possess, shuffling over the stones and making as much noise as a herd of chitul would have produced. He was a young buck, and bang went a rifle lower down the nullah. The animal plunged forward and galloped into the jungle. A near thing, for the bullet could have only just cleared the extraordinary high withers.

Shooting in this fashion, by the way, before a beat has started is not to be recommended, especially in the case of the novice. Everything will be new and strange to him at that period of his novitiate into Indian sport, and in attempting to bag what may prove to be a small trophy, he may send back something far better which would have come out in front of him had he waited for the beat to commence.

As one blows on one's fingers to keep up the circulation and watches a pair of noisy cross-bills winging their way overhead to the forest and some fruit-bearing tree, with the short flaps of the wings these birds affect, a faint distant sound is heard. The beaters have started! Looking to see that rifles and shot-guns are handy, one watches the strip of forest some sixty yards to the front. Presently there is a pattering of leaves to be heard. It ceases, recommences, and then ceases again. Although unable to see the animal, we know that it is somewhere on the edge of the forest, narrowly scanning the open nullah in front of it for possible enemies. There is a small barricade of bushes up in front; but as a matter of fact one could sit out in the open nullah amongst the stones just as safely, provided one is dressed in khaki and keeps *absolutely still*. This is the golden rule of the jungle. You have always to remember that the slightest movement *immediately* catches the eye of the jungle denizen, ever on the look out for danger, and danger from other moving animals.

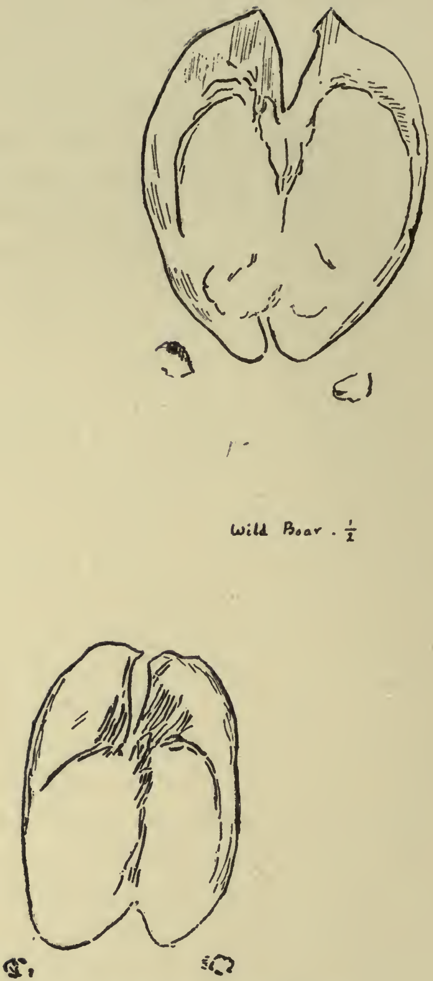


A herd of Chitul file across the nullah bed.

We patiently wait, and at last the animal makes up its mind and appears—a chitul only, and others are behind her. There is a small stag in the herd, who files out of the jungle near the end of the line, but nothing worth shooting. We watch them as they carefully and daintily pick their way across the stony nullah bed, going slowly at first, and then quickening up to a trot as they get half-way across and realize how exposed they are. These wide nullah beds often have areas of tall grass in them, and this makes it necessary to exercise a nice discrimination in firing at the right moment and leaving sufficient time to get in the second barrel at the animal, going fast as he almost certainly will, if you miss or only wound him with your first.

Before the chitul have disappeared, a heavy rustling and rattling away to the right, and out plunges a black mass and trots across the *rao,* followed by other black masses of various sizes. Wild boar or piggy these. Wait and watch a bit! There are some big ones in the nullah already, but there is probably a bigger one yet to come. Yes, there he is, nearly at the tail of the sounder, and a monster he is—fit object for a wild gallop with a spear in the hand. Although not near a good riding country for pig, one does not wish to fire at piggy. He is practically only shot to provide meat as a treat for the Gurkha orderlies and the low caste villager, all of whom will eat themselves sick once they get a chance at that dainty of dainties—pig's flesh.

The sounder passes with much indignant squeaking and grunting at being disturbed in this unseemly fashion, leaving their tracks deeply im-



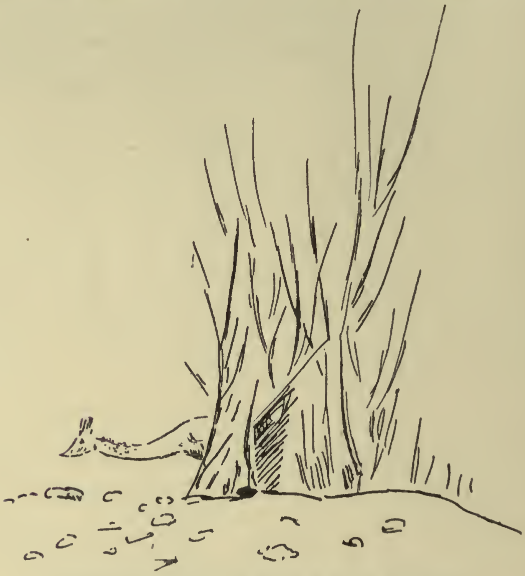
Tracks of the Wild Boar.

printed in the sandy parts of the nullah. These tracks are easily distinguishable from other jungle animals, as may be seen here. Then silence for a time.

Bang! bang! down the line, and one turns to see some chitul stags go off into the jungle. One has not seen whether one is down, but it is probable, as at this season the stags are to be found in small parties together.

A light but faintly-heard pattering in the grassy patch situated in the nullah bed to the right. Silence! and then more pattering. Something is on the move, and something very loth to break. We watch, and strive to pierce the grassy recesses. Suddenly right at the ground level a head appears.

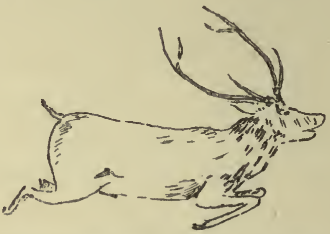
An old peacock—cunningest of all his tribe! He gazes anxiously all round out of his bright eye and withdraws his head; thrusts it forward again, makes up his mind and runs quickly out for a few paces. Then stands and stretches out his old neck, and the little beady eye gazes around with a piercing scrutiny. He does not like the noise behind, and he likes less the quiet in front! Suddenly over his head rockets an old cock jungle fowl, his wicked little red eye agleam, his back and wing-feathers glinting like burnished gold and copper, and his long metallic green tail-feathers streaming out behind with the pace he is going. This decides our friend the shallyer. The spot is not good enough for his health any longer. Down goes his head and he bolts part of the way across the open, and with a tremendous ‘swish, swish,’ of his powerful wings he leaps into the air, and with his glorious peacock train flung in streamers to the breeze he is off in the wake of the old cock. Two brown shadows flick past on soaring wing—jungle hens—and all is quiet again, save that the noise of the beaters has now arisen to a prolonged howl.



Suddenly at ground-level a head appears.

A crash in the jungle in front and then silence. Another rush up to our right in the forest and again a pause. Something heavy there. ‘Sambhar’ the orderly mutters, and we nod. Will he break in front of us though, or go up to the rifles on our right or left? Many of us have passed these anxious moments, for sambhar are kittle cattle! Often one will be on the point of breaking out, or even does just partly emerge from the forest, when his heart misgives him. Turning swiftly, he charges back towards the beaters, suddenly realizes that he is going from the frying-pan into the fire, swerves and plunges madly down through the forest parallel to the edge of the jungle, and then finally, hardening his heart, as the sound of the beaters strikes his ear more loudly, comes out and goes bounding across the open. Sometimes the loss of a shot at him has been entirely our own fault. He has come quietly down in front of the beaters to the edge of the forest. We may have heard a tiny twig or two crack, but as dead silence has ensued we have concluded that there is nothing in front of us, and certainly not a thing the size of a sambhar. But he has been there all the time, just inside the forest watching and listening. We have shifted slightly perhaps, or moved the rifle which has glinted in the sunshine. The sambhar's quick eye has caught the glint, and his suspicions are aroused. Nothing will now make him break at that point, and our chance is gone. On other occasions it is simply pure fear and the dislike to breaking into the open of a wide nullah which will make him turn. Such we fain hope is the cause on this occasion, for he breaks away below us, giving a fine galloping shot to the third rifle, who bowls him over.

A fine heavy beast, but the horns are but thirty-four, for the old big heads nowadays do not appear to frequent the maidan forest, but get away into the broken hilly country, where they must be followed and stalked down on foot—and a rare good sport this stalking is, as we shall see later, for one who is sound in wind and limb.



Plunges madly through the forest.

The breaking of the sambhar brings the beat to an end, for, it being early in the day, we are not firing at birds, and the pea-fowl, jungle-fowl and partridges which come out at the end of the beat are allowed to go scathless. They form pretty shooting towards the end of the day, especially if numerous, and the gun only takes the more difficult birds. And an old cock jungle-fowl, coming over the guns with a breeze behind him, takes some shooting, as most of us know!

A couple more beats take place before lunch, with varied fortune, but much of interest to the natural history lover and he who cares to watch

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THE INDIAN SPORTSMEN'S LUNCH CARRIER

PAD ELEPHANT READY FOR AN EVENING STROLL

the ways of the jungle beasts in their own homes. In one of them excitement runs high, for a panther was reported in the beat, and ‘spots’ is ever fondly looked out for, the more so that he is so terribly difficult to mark down. He can lie up under a stone or leaf almost, so wonderfully does his colouring and the peculiar manner he crouches when lying low assimilate to his environment. ‘Spots’ broke back this time, several excited beaters saying that they had witnessed the manœuvre—whether true or no, it is impossible to say, since the men imagine all sorts of things when they are told that there is a tiger or leopard in the beat.

Detailing our experiences, we make for the luncheon rendezvous, where we find our lunch-basket carrier, who has also brought out a lady or two from the camp without any extra inconvenience, standing beneath a shady pipal tree, keeping off the flies by flicking himself with a branch torn from the tree; a branch the weight of which any one of us would have been sorry to have had to lift even. He and his mahout are the picture of somnolent ease—both absolutely typical of the East!

We throw ourselves down, and the glint and gleam of foam-topped glasses calls forth sighs of general content with life under these conditions!

CHAPTER III

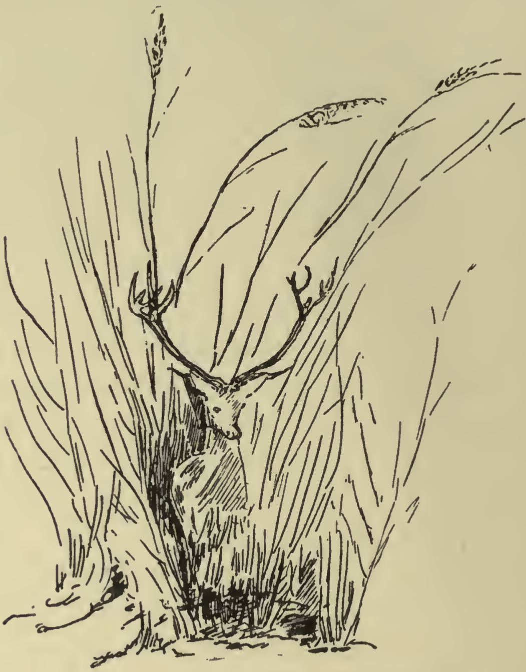
Barasingha and chitul—Barasingha does—Barasingha, chitul, and sambhar stags—A herd of barasingha breaking cover to graze—The old stag leads the way—Unrest of does—The herd on the alert—The alarm—A good barasingha stag—Size of horns—Tracks of barasingha—The midday siesta—Barking of trees by stags—The silent forest pool—A glorious stag—Chitul—Beauty of the stag—Habits—Size of horns—Chitul tracks—Wariness of the old stag—A herd leaving the forest to graze—Patient wait for the stag—Curiosity of does—The stag appears—Darkness approaches—The stag grows curious—Death of the stag.

BARASINGHA AND CHITUL

HAVE you ever noticed the curious appearance of barasingha does at a distance? When walking they hold their heads stretched out with the ears held back and hanging low, the hind-quarters sloping upwards and outwards to a point, and the scut extended, giving them the appearance of giant goats. The stags have naturally a great resemblance to sambhar stags, and at a distance it is always a question, since the barasingha comes in size between the sambhar and the chitul, whether the does are chitul or barasingha, and whether the stags are sambhar or barasingha. A close inspection at distances of 200 yards or so, or closer in long grass, is always necessary to determine the question.

It is most interesting to watch a herd of these animals troop out of the forest at sundown into the open grass lands. One beautiful, though hot, evening in April in the Central Provinces, I was slowly and silently strolling up a little grass maidan which ran up into an isthmus between the green walls of the sál forest in front of me, when I heard a noisy crackling of dead leaves in the forest to my right front. I sat down on a rock, kept perfectly steady, and watched. A few barasingha does soon approached the edge of the forest, and scouted about just inside, a practice followed by most of the deer tribe before coming out into the open. Indistinctly in the leafy bower I could see a few stags engaged in a similar operation. Once, however, they had made up their minds that all was safe, the whole herd tramped noisily out over the dead leaves, for all the world like a troop of New Forest ponies. They poured out of the forest in a manner totally dissimilar to the usual procedure of a herd of chitul, who always loiter out, the stags coming last, and often taxing one's patience severely.

I have noticed also that a barasingha herd is often led by the largest stag, which is also unusual, for the large stag of the chitul generally in my experience stalks out majestically by himself, some time after his harem have got well out into the open and begun to graze.

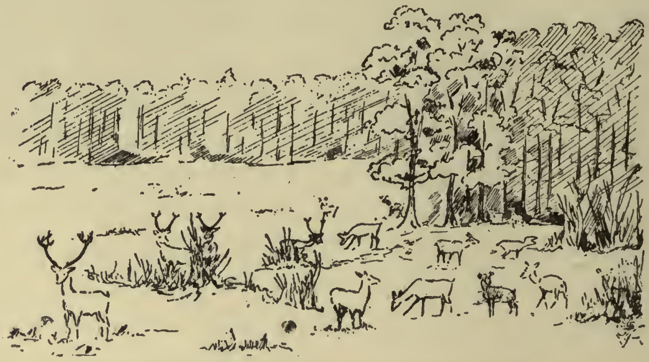


The old Barasingha stag led the way.

Not so the barasingha. The old stag in the herd I watched proudly led the way, and when well clear of the forest stood erect, a glorious figure of expectancy and suspicion, as he scanned every inch of the open country and snuffed up the wind. Seeing and scenting nothing suspicious, he stalks onwards. Suddenly one of the does emits a startled yelp, that peculiar, harsh sound of the barasingha which is totally unlike the sharp note of the chitul. The stag comes to an abrupt halt, and up goes his head again, and he stands like a statue cast in bronze. A long and more suspicious wait this time, and I feel rather than see his eye in my direction. I scarcely breathe, and remain as inert as the rock upon which I am seated. At last he feels absolutely certain that all is safe, and then he takes a few quick majestic strides into the open, lowers his great head, and commences to crop the sweet-scented grass. No more notice is now taken by the lord of the herd and the *chota sahebs*—for some half-dozen other stags with horns of various sizes are in attendance on the old one—of the cries of the giddy, suspicious, and frolicsome young females, though a young stag will be found ready to ogle and have a sly frolic with a handsome young doe of the harem if he can compass such with safety; for he has a very wholesome and natural respect for those mighty antlers carried by his lord and master.

I was surprised to find these stags still with the does, as it was already near the end of April, at which period the stags are usually in small parties by themselves, the large herds consisting entirely of old and young does and immature stags.

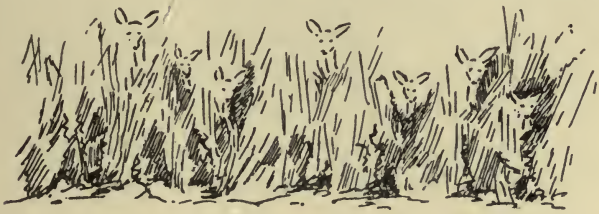
As I sat an interested spectator of this great herd, which numbered some fifty individuals, and there may have been more, a sudden sharp note came into the squeak of one of the does. The old stag threw up his noble head in sharp annoyance, and if ever a stag swore deeply the patriarch not 40 yards from me did so. Here he was, in a beautiful secluded forest-encircled green nook, just commencing his evening meal on his favourite sweet-scented pasture, and those pestilent females persisted in sounding the note of alarm. 'What can they mean ?' he muttered, as other does caught up and gave out the alarm signal. Some of the does began edging off towards the forest; one or two of the smaller stags exhibited evident signs of uneasiness! The great stag



Herd of Barasingha leaving the forest to graze.

was too old a campaigner to despise the warnings. He advanced a few paces and struck his forefoot in anger into the turf. Suddenly he turned to stone. Then a short, sharp, deep bark, and the herd turned as one and melted into the forest, with a patter as of a storm wind blowing through thick, dead leaves.

It is a pretty sight to watch this sudden alarm of a herd. They are all, save for a restless spirit or two, silently feeding like a herd of grazing cows in a home paddock in Old England, or like the deer in Richmond or Windsor Park, which any Londoner will have seen. Suddenly up and round come all the heads. A few will close up and front forward, and you see over the top of the grass a number of pairs of large, bat-like ears, all flung forward so as to expose the light-coloured inner portion. A long, much-elongated, lean neck will be seen below the higher pairs of ears, a pair of eyes between the ears, and a soft muzzle.



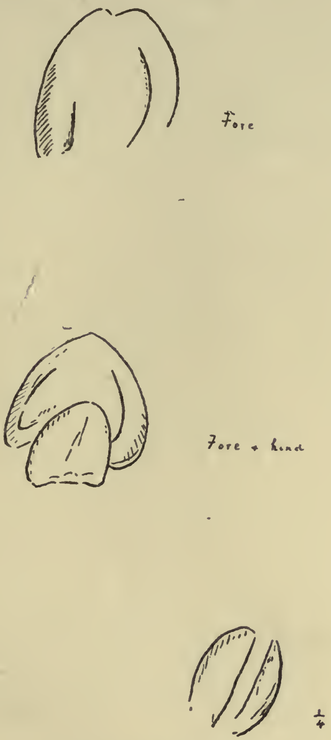
A number of pairs of bat-like ears.

Watch! Not a movement is to be seen, not a flicker of an eyelid nor twitch of an ear. The herd is turned to stone. Like statues they will stand for minutes together in this alert manner. Suddenly one emits a startled hoarse croak, round they swing, and the herd melts away like the fall of autumn leaves. Occasionally a barasingha stag will stand his ground until the herd has almost disappeared; but this is rarely the case with the chitul stag. He generally leads the van in a sudden retreat.

No beautiful springy bounds are to be seen such as those marvellous little animals, the black buck, present to your incredulous eyes when they move off, although both barasingha and chitul does do jump a bit, especially when retreating in long grass, so as to be able to see about them.

It is astonishing, too, what bounds the heavy barasingha and the lighter-built chitul stags, with their heavy heads of antlers, can compass when they try.

A barasingha stag in good condition weighs on an average 32 stone, whilst anything measuring 35 inches and above is considered a good head. The horns are smooth, the brow tine being nearly at right angles to the beam. The record head for the Central Provinces is 41 inches, whilst in the United Provinces 36 inches is quoted as a record. An average head is 30 inches round the curve, and 5 inches at midbeam. The points in the horns vary a good deal, it being a common thing to secure a head carrying more points on the one side than on the other. As many as 20 points have been counted on a head. The average height



Tracks of Barasingha.

at the shoulder is 45 inches, the length 6 feet, and tail 8 inches.

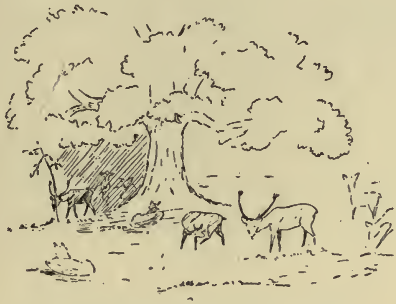
Have you ever examined the tracks of barasingha? I show some here. They are broader than those of the chitul, and can be distinguished easily from these latter.

THE MIDDAY SIESTA—BARASINGHA

Few people are probably aware how terribly destructive deer can be in a forest. It is not only the damage they do to the trees in feeding upon the buds and young leaves and leading shoots of young saplings, or in breaking them down, though German Forest Officers have to suffer considerable damage and heart-burnings from this source; especially in those areas, such as in Saxony and other parts where the Royal Command necessitates a certain head of deer being kept up in the Royal Forests for sporting purposes.

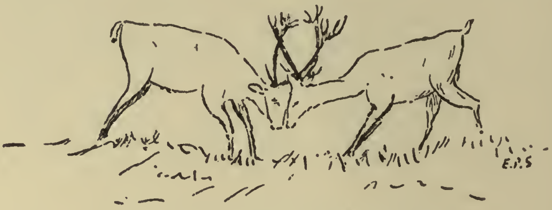
Out in India, at present, at any rate, the chief damage done is due to barking young trees and saplings. It is commonly known that whilst the horns are in velvet a certain amount of itching makes itself felt when the horn has become *pakka*, and the velvet is beginning to peel off. To allay this irritation the stag rubs his horns against young trees, and in doing so peels the bark off them, thus killing them. But this rubbing the horns against trees under the exigencies of pain is the only plea the stag can put forward to exculpate himself from this propensity of his.

I was watching a herd of barasingha the other day slowly leaving an open grassy area for the shade of a fine old forest monarch, depicted here, which stood on the edge of the forest. The dense shade afforded by this fine old tree was evidently a favourite noonday siesta site for this herd from the matter-of-fact manner in which they were slowly wending their way towards it. Some were already seated in its shade. Others were just entering into it, whilst a long, straggling tail, spread out for some 100 yards across the maidan, all gradually on their way to escape the rays of the sun, already getting hot (though not yet 9 a.m.) in this month of April in the Central Provinces.



The midday siesta—Barasingha.

It was interesting to watch the manner in which this herd loitered their way along, stopping to crop here and there some succulent tuft of grass, or the young, playful stags to have a *tour de force* against each other, to try their strength and to see how the horns—those adornments of which they were secretly so proud—were coming on in view of future encounters for the possession of the gentle but wideawake does. But my attention was chiefly taken up, firstly, with a magnificent stag who had evidently been one of the first to feel the heat and to seek the grateful siesta. He lay squatting down with his head almost, if not quite, resting with the muzzle on the ground, probably to ease the weight of those heavy horns, and he appeared to be dozing somnolently. As I watched him he suddenly raised it to scratch, with the tip of the right antler, an irritating spot in his body. He then returned to his former position.



Young Barasingha stags sparring.

Hard by was a young restless stag, and he it was who is the cause of these lines. For he was restlessly rubbing first his antlers and then the crown of his head against a young sál sapling, which from its appearance had had to brave other assaults of this nature in days gone by; for it was almost barkless and nearly dead, save for a few green leaves hanging limply to the twig or two left. Another stag, also a young one of 2–3 years, slowly drew near the first and endeavoured to start the same game, and this led to a butting exhibition, which in its way was rather fine, as both the youngsters seemed to very rapidly lose their tempers, and what was started in play appeared to become a serious business. The sparring was carried on with the young sapling between them, and what was left of the bark was soon torn away in shreds. I saw the old stag look round once as much as to say, ‘ What on earth are you youngsters at, making yourselves hot and uncomfortable for nothing! Why don’t you sit down peacefully in the shade and rest ? ’ Advice the young never wish to receive nor understand when it is given them.

I left the youngsters at it, for I had several miles to go, and as the old stag said it was getting hot, and there were points in favour of his idea when one looked at his grateful shade.

THE SILENT FOREST POOL

A barasingha stag is a beautiful beast, and at no time I think have I seen him to more advantage than when one evening in a jungle stroll in the hot weather I came upon a wonderfully peaceful and sylvan scene.

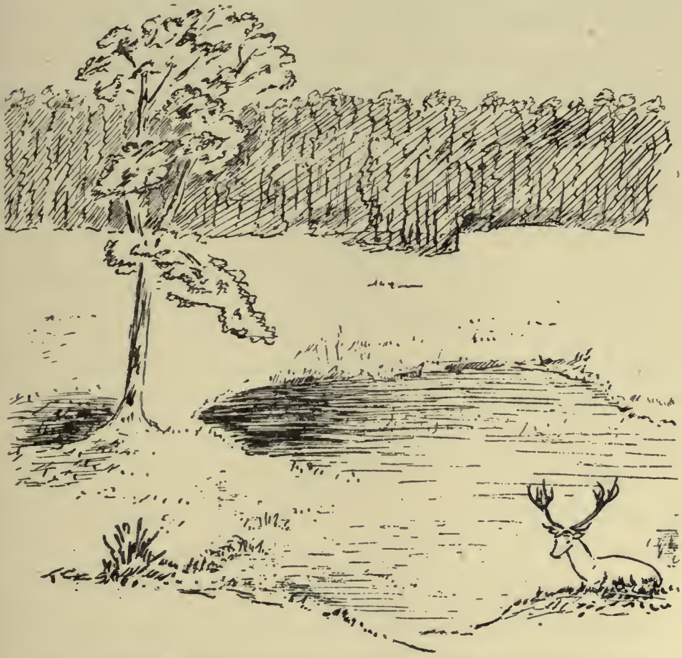
We had been scrunching and crackling over the dead sál leaves and dry brittle twigs of the sál forest, which in April gives out as much sound as if an army of elephants were on the move instead of a couple of pigmy men, and makes the heart droop in utter despair of getting near anything living, much less a decent antlered but wily stag.

Our route led us over a low rocky ridge, from whence we had dropped down through the forest and emerged on to one of the beautiful grassy dells or little tongue-like valleys which run up between the hills. Moving down this we rounded a jutting-out fringe of sal forest, and came suddenly upon a lovely little tarn. A very jewel was this little pool, the surface placid and unruffled reposing in a setting of emerald-green and yellow grass with a backing of the glorious vivid green sál forest, the trees as straight as masts and densely set together.

But that which at once riveted the sportsman's gaze and added a charm all its own to this lovely sylvan scene, was a magnificent fourteen-pointer barasingha stag quietly seated at the edge of the tarn. We stood silently in our tracks and watched him. Here, one thought, he had passed the day sheltered from the blazing sun, peacefully dozing through the long hot hours by the side of the beautifully cool and limpid waters of the little pool—now and then perhaps waking up to lazily crop a mouthful or two of the short, sweet succulent grass, or again to gaze into the dark depths of the still surface of the water.

He was engaged in this occupation when we suddenly appeared on the scene, and it was some seconds before that instinct which never sleeps in the jungle denizens warned him that foes were near.

His head swung round to us, one searching startled glance of inquiry and fear, and he sprang to his feet and stood rigid—a glorious sight, perhaps one of the most glorious nature has to show, a full-grown, perfectly developed and beautifully proportioned fourteen-pointer stag, with head, body, and limbs tense with the alertness preceding the swift turn and bound with which the animal commences his retreat.



A 14-pointer Barasingha stag seated at the edge of the tarn.

The barasingha before me was an unusually fine stag ; but he was to live to visit the peaceful little tarn once again, let us hope many times again, and to dream there through many long, hot quiet hours of the Happy Hunting Grounds of the future, for barasingha were 'closed' to shooting in that locality for the rest of the season.

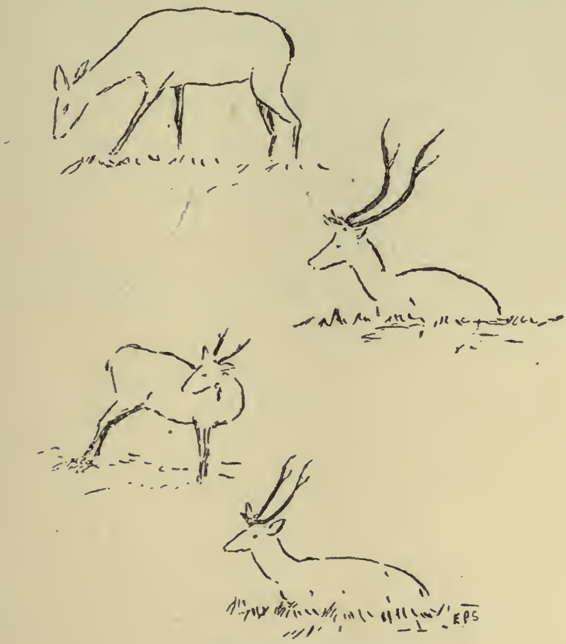
Magnificent as he was, I could not regret the loss of such a trophy, for I derived more pleasure and a more lasting impression from our meeting in such a manner than I should now from the possession of those fine antlers as a result of an easy shot.

CHITUL OR SPOTTED DEER

Most people will be inclined to agree that a chitul or spotted deer stag in his natural surroundings is a beautiful object, and beautiful in quite a different manner to that of a barasingha or sambhar or the red deer. He has none of the rugged almost fierce beauty which is an attribute of the latter two deer.

The other day I wounded a stag in a beat, and as soon as the drive had ended I followed the deer into the long grass and tree forest behind me. Blood was plentiful, for the poor beast was hard hit, and at the end of half a mile's easy tracking through open tree forest with but a scant undergrowth beneath I came upon my quarry. He was standing beneath a small leafless tree, his head, adorned with a pair of beautifully symmetrical horns, turned towards me, and the sun glinting upon the pale but bright yellow chestnut coat with its horizontal rows of white spots, and the snow-white of the under part of the neck and belly.

A shot through the heart finished him, and as I stood by and watched the beautiful eye glazing I felt I would have given a good deal to have been able to bring him to life, and put him back into his glorious jungles again.



Chitul stags and doe.

It was the end of December in Northern India, and yet the upper parts of the horns of this stag still had a sheathing of velvet on them.

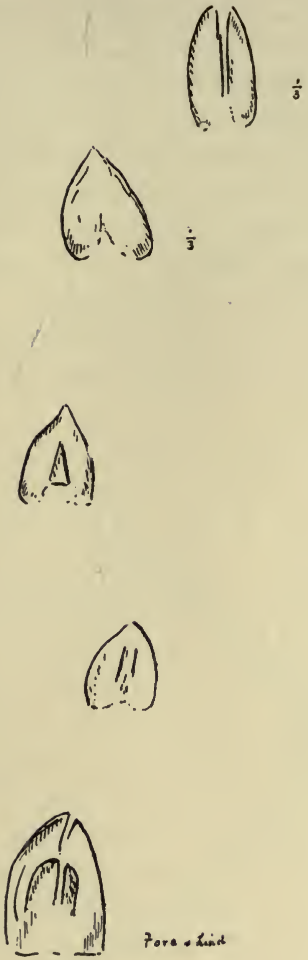
The spotted deer, in Northern India at any rate, and the same is, I think, the case in the Central Provinces, sheds its horns and acquires fresh ones much later in the season than is the case with either barasingha or sambhar. The chitul in the Tarai are not really shootable till about March, although it will of course be possible to come across a clean head before this date. I have seen numberless heads all through December, January, and February, and the majority have almost invariably been in velvet.

In framing rules for close seasons, such natural history factors require to be well known and borne in mind.

The horns are shed during the rains and ensuing cold weather, but on this subject it is probable that we have much to learn. I was out recently in the middle of October having a first beat for junglefowl, when a stag chitul was put up. It broke back through the beaters, and one of them aimed a stick at it. The stick struck the right antler, which dropped off at the blow. An examination showed that it was evidently just ready to be shed.

A chitul stag carries a head of three points similar to a sambhar, but the antler is not nearly so massive. There is the main antler with a branch near the top, the outer tine being always the longer, and the frontal tine.

The record head for this deer is 39½ inches round the curve. His Excellency Lord Minto nearly


1/3
1/3
Fore & hind

Chitul tracks.

approached this with a 39¼ inch, shot at Mohand in the Siwaliks, in April, 1909.

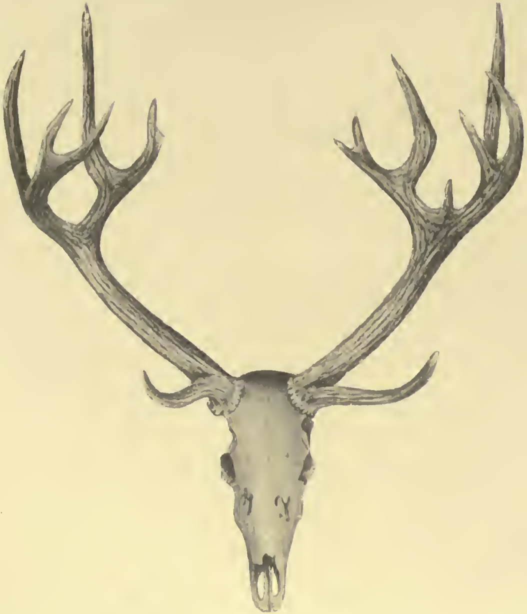
Thirty-six inch is considered a good head. A chitul stag in good condition runs from 200 lbs. to 250 lbs. in weight, being 32 inches at the shoulder.

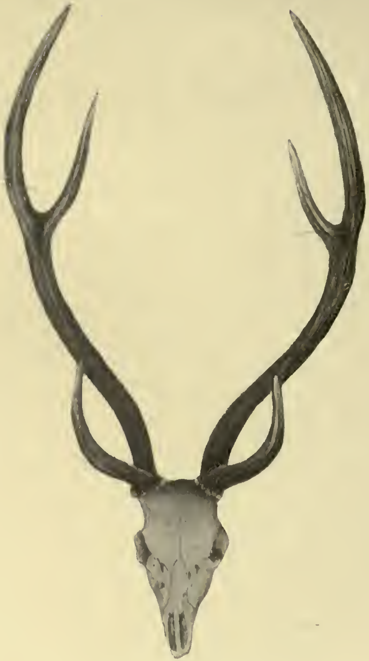
The rutting season for spotted deer is very irregular, fawns being born throughout the year. The horns are consequently shed very irregularly, mostly perhaps between October and March. The period of gestation is eight months.

The tracks of the chitul are narrower and more pointed in front, and also smaller than those of the barasingha.

I have noted, so far as my experience goes, that the chitul stag appears to be more wary than the barasingha. Or I may better express my own observations by saying that the former stag appears to almost invariably leave the forest last when in company of a herd of does and smaller stags.

Often have I waited in vain for a shot at the big stag of a herd. I remember on one occasion I watched a herd for several evenings in succession, in the hopes of securing a good stag I had marked down in it. The herd was curious in one way. There was a white or albino hind in it. I have often regretted since that I did not shoot this white doe instead of spending my energies on the stag. I do not fancy that albino does are uncommon amongst chitul, but it happens to be the only case I have seen myself.


A HEAVY BARASINGHA HEAD


A 37-INCH CHITUL HEAD

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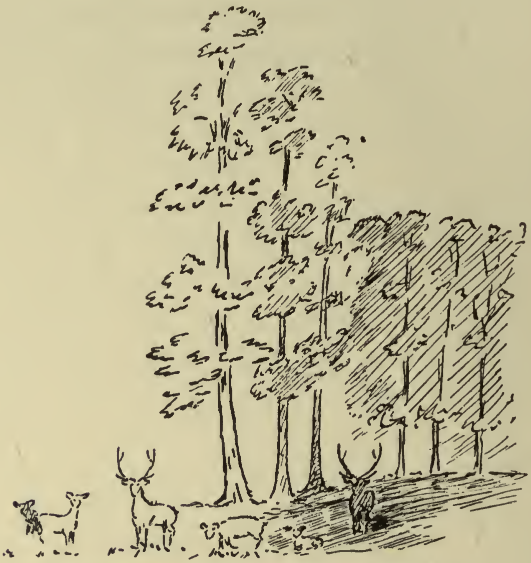
To return to the stag. I stalked up to my customary position, and arrived just as the first does were issuing from the edge of the sál forest. This first lot of hinds came out more or less together, and then gradually separated as they commenced to graze over the grassy plain. Nearer and nearer to my position came the outposts and vedettes, and I sat as silent and still as death, keeping one eye on them and the other on the point in the forest from which I expected the stag to emerge.

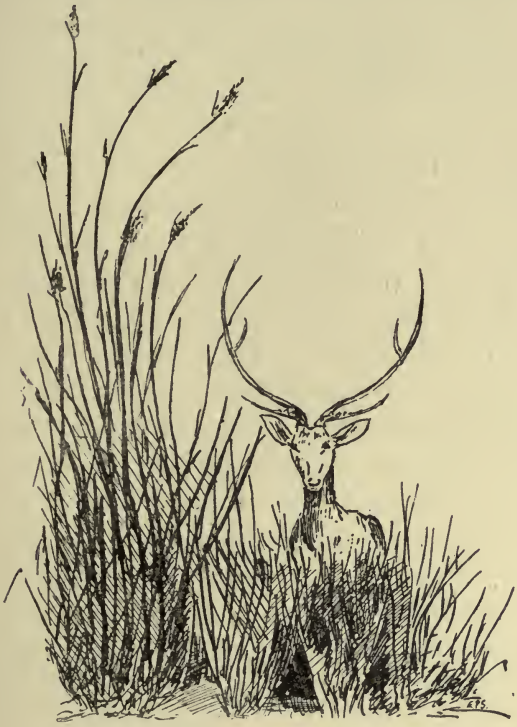
It is little short of astonishing how close chitul does will come to one if one makes no movement. One morning I noticed a few chitul cross, some distance ahead of me, a *kutcha* road running through the forest. I ran lightly up the road and arrived almost up to the point where the does had crossed. At the side of the road, to my right, was a large stone roughly marking the mile. I sat down on this, laid my rifle across my knees, and waited. I heard rustling in the scrub jungle, which was fairly thick, in front of me and also across the road. Soon a doe and a youngster came out on to the road, looked round—they were within fifteen yards of me—and slowly crossed into the jungle. Two others followed, and then came the stag. To my disappointment he was a small one. I sat on, and presently the rustling in front came nearer, and three does and a youngster pushed their way slowly through the bushes, and stood and looked at me within five yards. I kept my eyes low so that they could not look into them. Another rustle, and there was the stag. He looked up casually, dropped his head, and then suddenly looked up again. I had not moved, but something aroused his suspicions. He stared fixedly for some seconds, gave one short, snappy yelp, and the party were gone.



A herd of Chitul on the edge of the forest.

On the present occasion these does were beginning to bother me. The big stag had not appeared, and yet already some of the vedettes were quite close to me, and one or two had got into some long grass on my right, prevent-ing me from any longer following their movements.

'At last!' I muttered, as a clatter of dead leaves made itself heard in the forest. Out steps the stag with head carried royally as he takes a few short, quick, stilted steps into the open and looks round.



Out steps the stag.

What a picture he makes!

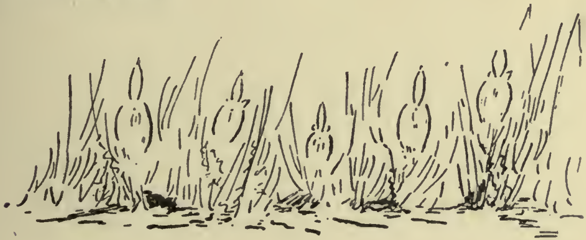
My hopes of at last bagging him run high. Instead, however, of advancing farther, down goes his head, and he commences to crop the sweet grass in eager mouthfuls.

Nearer came the pernicious does, and one away to the right has now left the grass and is approaching me on flank. The stag throws up his head and again advances with a long, curiously undulating, proud stride. Easy it is to see that he knows himself to be the undisputed lord there. I carefully draw a sight on him. Too far yet! I cautiously turn my head. That confounded doe is within twenty paces of me, and others are following in her tracks. In front I can see seven does of various sizes all within 30 to 40 yards.

I glance away to the west, and my heart sinks, for the upper rim of the sun is just dropping behind the tree-tops, and I know that I have but little time left. Something must be done, and that quickly. The stag is gradually feeding towards me, and I estimate his distance at about 90 yards, perhaps less, as the light is already becoming doubtful.

Carefully assuming a crouching position, I suddenly stand erect, without making a sound, and with my rifle levelled on the stag. The does to the right take one look and make for the grass. The heads of those in front come up, the ears flick forward, and they stand and stare at me, move a few paces back, and stare again. I have the darkening forest behind me, and calculated that I should probably be difficult to distinguish. I keep my eye on the stag. At the first movement of the does, up goes his head, and he stands watchful.

He evidently cannot distinguish me, and does not understand the vagaries and antics of his harem. He advances a few strides, halts, and then advances again. ‘He cannot now be more than fifty paces away,’ I think, but he is standing fronting me, tearing at the turf with his forefoot and evidently in a royal rage. The light is flickering and vile, but there is nothing for it, and I aim at his chest. The stag sinks in his tracks, raises himself half up as the frightened herd dash past him for the safe precincts of the forest, and then sinks to rise no more. As I rush forward towards the stag with my eye on the retreating herd, the long white scuts of the doe chitul are what chiefly attract one as they disappear into the grass fringing the forest. Their scuts are held stiff in the air over the rump, and look more like giant white rabbit scuts than anything else. They are slightly curved over the back, but jerk backwards and forwards with each jump.

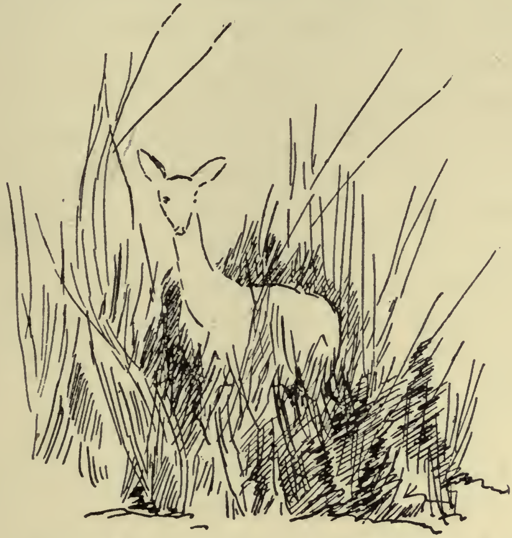


CHAPTER IV

Sambhar—Habits—Does—Appearance—Tracks of sambhar—Size of horns—Mother and youngster—The mother's alarm—The youngster's behaviour—The youngster takes a toss—The sambhar stag—Wariness of—How to find the stag—Disappearance of large stags from plains' forest—Poaching—Tracking the old stags in the hills—Difficult country—The big stag—An unexpected *rencontre*—A cold wait—Drawn blank—A long tramp—See a stag—Fall of the stag—A difficult descent—Find the stag—Curious horns—The native shikari's two kinds of sambhar.

SAMBHAR

THE sambhar is a much heavier and clumsier animal than the barasingha, and the noise of a stampeding herd is like unto that of a troop of heavy cavalry charging. Their movements are heavy, and do not possess the beauty and grace peculiar to the smaller deer and many of the antelope, though they are by no means so ungainly and awkward as the nilgai or blue bull, probably the clumsiest of all antelopes. For their size it is wonderful how quietly a number of sambhar can move through the forest or long grass without making a sound, or but little sound.



An old doe will stand on the edge of the forest.

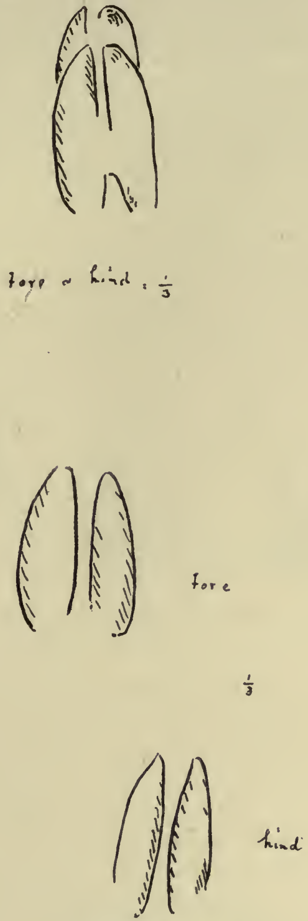
When not startled, the deer's movements are slow, and they graze in Indian file along the animal path to which they keep ; or at most stray but a few feet from it to browse, returning to it again.

If you watch a herd of does on the feed, you will find that they progress at a very slow rate indeed when grazing in this manner. Watch them come out of the forest into the grass. An old doe will probably lead the way, and stand on the edge of the forest for several minutes, searching intently every yard of the open grass area in front of her to the distant horizon before she moves out into it. Her ears flick backwards and forwards as she listens to catch the faintest inimical sound, and she noses and snuffs the air for foreign alarming scents.

At length she is apparently satisfied, and moves forward and commences to crop the grass. Now the rest of the herd, comprised of does of all sizes who have been halting just within the leafy shade of the trees, follow in her tracks, and more or less keep to them at first. Watch them!

The ears are ever on the move flickering backwards and forwards, and their longish scuts are propelled incessantly from side to side. They move along holding the head low. Only when alarmed is the head thrown up, the ears flick forward and remain erect and rigid, whilst the neck is stretched to the utmost length to enable a complete survey of the surrounding neighbourhood to be made. Sambhar will remain in this position for minutes at a time if they are really alarmed, and then with a sharp squeal they turn to the right-about and are off at their curious lumbering gallop, crashing through everything as they lollop along in lumbering bounds, which have but little of the agility of the barasingha or chitul about them.

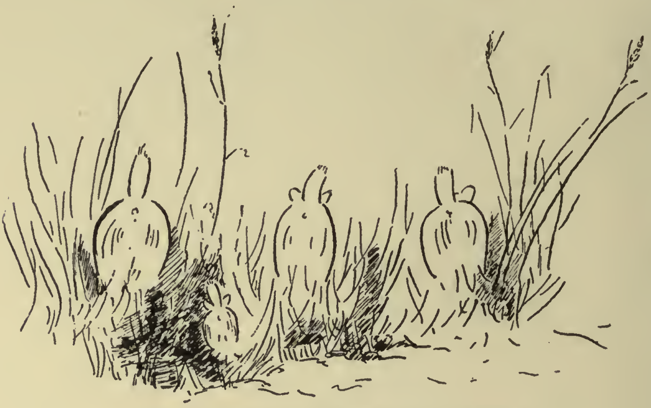
The hair is very coarse, and they are dark brown in colour, instead of yellow-brown, as is the barasingha.


fore & hind : 1/3
fore
1/3
hind

Sambhar tracks.

The tracks are elongate and rather broad, being longer than the barasingha and not so broad in proportion to the length. They are not so pointed as those of the chitul and are easily recognizable.

When at the trot or run, as is the case with the chitul, the long scut is held erect or curving over the back slightly, and this method of holding it may be noticed amongst young sambhar when they are mincing along in the stilted walk they affect. Usually very young stags, I have noticed, are particularly addicted to this mode of progression.



The thick scuts of the sambhar does.

The scut is much broader than that of the chitul, and has a flat broad end to it instead of the long pointed end of long hairs found in the chitul.

Burke (in the *Indian Field Shikar book*) gives as his record, a head of 50⅛ inches, with a girth of 9⅜ inches from Bhopal. Such heads do not exist nowadays. The average length may be taken at

30 inches, and anything at 40 inches is good. The average height at the shoulder of this deer is 54 inches, the length 6 feet 6 inches, and the weight 500–700 lbs.

MOTHER AND YOUNGSTER

Have you ever noticed what a 'high-stepper' a doe sambhar is when she is alarmed, but is not quite sure where the danger comes from or what it really is? And have you noted the absurd manner in which a youngster copies its mother?

I was out on a broad fire-line in the forest one morning in April. It was light, but the sun had not yet topped the low forest-crowned hill to my right. Going up a rise quite silently, we suddenly came to an abrupt halt as a doe sambhar emerged from the forest on the far side, and half crossed the line. She then spotted a slight movement, probably on our part, but could not clearly make out what it was. She stopped on the instant and stood like stone for a minute or so, and then uttered a short, sharp bark with a note half of fear, half of interrogation in it. No result! The lady became annoyed and restive, and then commenced that high-stepping that I have alluded to, the ears being kept forward and the scut erected in the air. She raised first one fore-leg and then the other, curved and bent almost up to her chest in the most approved fashion of the London high-stepper park horse. As a leg was lowered it was set down with force and decision—stamped into the ground, in fact, after the fashion of her sex when annoyed the world over! Her movements were just as if she were hung on wires or stepping on hot coals, save and only that her feet were always put down with a stamp.

She moved about for some time in this manner, not making much progress in any direction, but shifting her ground at each step, the while emitting at intervals the short, sharp bark.

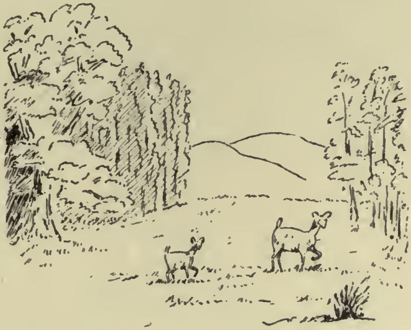
I had thought that she was alone, but not so. There was a youngster at heel, and he, getting tired of this performance on the part of his mother and doubtless thinking it all foolishness to remain hidden in the jungle any longer, strolled out on to the line.

He saw nothing, but looking at his mother, round came his little head, forward flicked the ears (which looked much too large for him), up went his little scut, and he began to go gravely through the same antics as his mother.

He stepped high in the most approved fashion and stamped his little hoofs into the ground, always taking care to have the same fore-leg in the air as his parent, and, following her example, emitted now and then curious laughable little short squeaking barks.

It was a ludicrous and at the same time a very pretty sight to watch the little fellow with his long shaggy coat and coarse, rough-looking appearance, which all the young sambhar have.

That the little chap had not the faintest notion where the danger was, or whether there was any, was evidenced after a short time by his giving up his antics, unconcernedly looking about in the opposite direction, carelessly cropping a mouthful or two of grass, and finally exhibiting all the evidences of a thoroughly spoilt and fed-up child who had had enough of this game and wanted to go on.



Mother and youngster.

Anything more ludicrous I have rarely seen in my life. That young sambhar behaved towards its respected parent in exactly the same manner as would a tired-out and satiated child !

Having watched this little tableau to my satisfaction I moved slowly forward, and at last the doe realized that it was really a specimen of that awful animal man who had managed to get so close to her neighbourhood.

With one short, sharp, affrighted bark she bounded madly forward a few yards towards the forest, then changed her mind and doubled on her tracks so suddenly as to clean bowl over her youngster, who, following her a little to the left, was caught amidships. The mother did not wait then to see to him, but in a couple of bounds cleared the line and was in the forest. The youngster picked himself up like any other youngster in the animal world would do under similar circumstances. Having but a little way to fall, he was on his feet again and into the jungle like a flash with never a squeak or bark.

I will say for the mother that her momentary panic *was* momentary only, for she could not have gone twenty paces into the forest before she remembered and pulled up, and waited, most anxiously we may be sure. Her anxiety lasted but a few seconds, however, and as the youngster went by at a wild gallop she was off after him.

THE SAMBHAR STAG

Surely a noble sambhar stag with a massive 44-inch head is one of the finest, or I will say amongst the finest, sights the Indian jungle has to show. Although he has none of the airy grace of the smaller of the deer tribe in India, his great size and majestic carriage give him a lordly and noble air, and combine to make him a real king amongst our deer and antelope.

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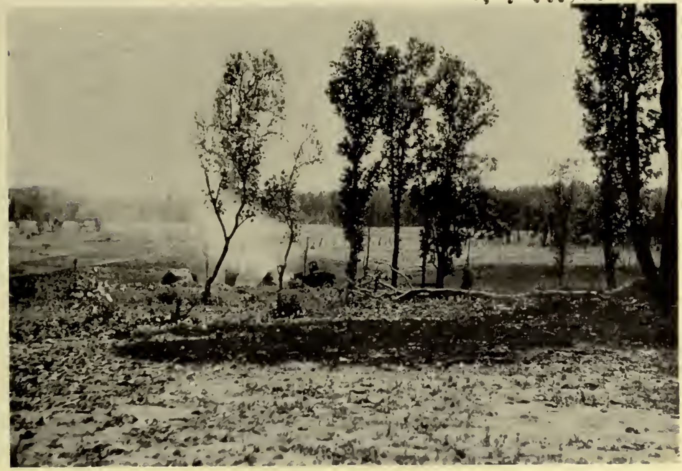
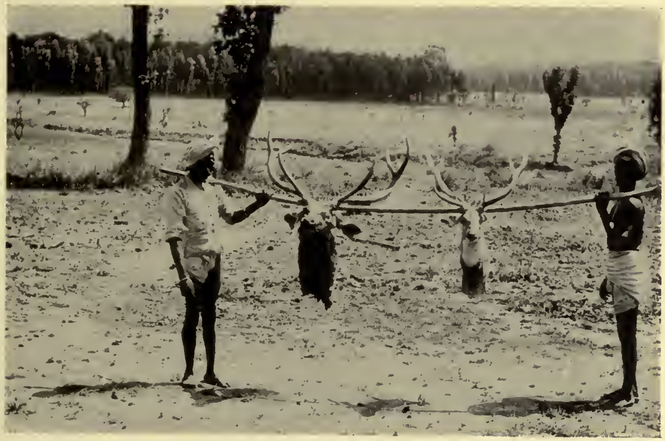


SÁL FOREST AND OPEN GRASS *MAIDAN* AREAS IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES



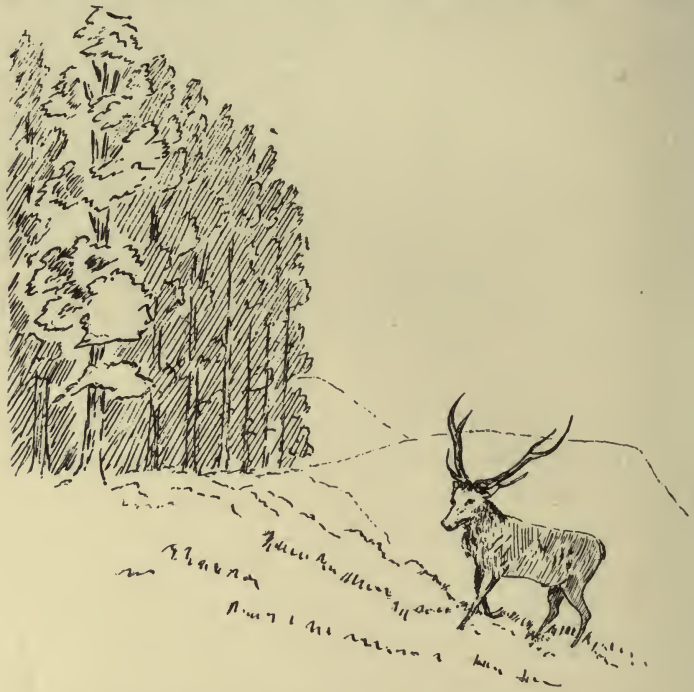
HEAVY SAMBHAR AND CHITUL HEADS SHOT IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES. A FINE BLOCK OF SÁL FOREST IS SEEN IN THE BACKGROUND

At the same time he is one of the wariest of the jungle denizens. When with his harem he expects the does to protect him, and will be found in the rear when the herd is on the march. It is only at night or at dawn or early dusk that he will be found in the open, either in the beautiful grassy dells and savannahs which are to be found in the sál forest country, or in the fields devouring the crops of the wretched jungle cultivator, the inhabitant of the forest village ; for he is not above taking toll of young succulent crops, though he is at his very wariest when doing so.

Well aware are the jungle men of his habits and peculiarities. ‘ It is of no use, sahib,’ they will tell you. ‘ You must go out and take up your position long before daybreak on one of the likely animal runs by which he will return at earliest dawn to the forest, if you want to get a shot at a good stag. And then beware, oh, beware of the does ! For if they so much as get the slightest suspicion of your presence, good-bye to all chance of seeing the stag. He will be off like the wind.’

Rarely will a stag worth a second glance at be caught napping out in the open once the sun has risen over the hill or tree-tops.

There can be little doubt, I think, with the enormously increased shooting to which the forests of the country are becoming more and more subject, that the sambhar, or the old, wily, large sambhar with the shootable heads, are leaving the plains' forests, and taking more and more to the hilly country, and are less seldom than formerly to be found in the open or even in fairly thick forest which is situated near a sporting centre or near villages containing 'sporting' (save the mark!) shikaris.



Sambhar stag returning to the forest in the early morning.

Fire protection in the large Reserved forests of the plains has also perhaps something to do with this. There is no doubt that successfully fire-protected forests do not afford the same amount of fresh succulent grass annually as exists on burnt over areas. There is probably a certain amount of truth in the lines put into the sambhar's mouth in the 'Autobiography of a Sambhar Stag' (*Leaves from an Indian Jungle*).

"Sahib! you are steadily driving us from our home on these hills. Why is the grass never fired now, and why left to die down season after season till it cumbers the earth with such a mildewed and powdery carpeting as none but the rankest herbage may penetrate when the rain comes down? The bison are going, and we follow, and at no distant time these hills will stand yet more desolate, deprived of all that once gladdened their solitude."

Without the most rigid protection, as exemplified by the formation of Game Sanctuaries and the limiting of the number of head shot annually in definite areas, there can be little doubt that all heavy game shooting worthy of the name will at no distant date be a thing of the past in India.

Nowadays, if the sportsman wishes to obtain a good sambhar head, it is to the hilly country to which he must turn his eyes, and it is to his own two legs that he must trust to take him up to the stag. And I do not think that most true shikaris will be sorry that this is so. A grand old stag is far too fine a quarry to end his life ignominiously from a shot from a howdah whose occupant has done nothing personally to get up to the fine old beast, or to drop to the rifle of a would-be shikari sitting over a salt lick!

Sterndale in the old days endeavoured to defend this latter practice by some specious arguments, but it is a pastime which even the Government of India have realized smacks too much of the methods of our Aryan Brother to fall within the term of sport, and have prohibited it.

I have often thought, too, that it is a pity that a fine stag should end his days at the end of a drive through the forest when, flying mad with terror from a pandemonium behind him, he bites the dust in front of a sportsman carefully ensconced upon his run.

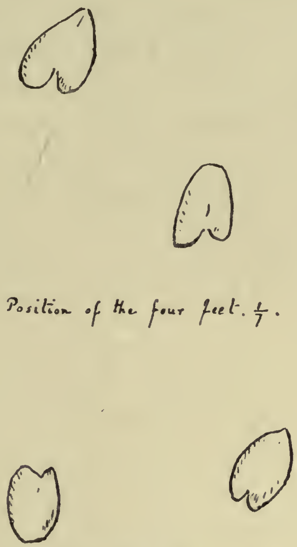
Is there very much difference between the methods of such a sportsman and those of a wild dog?

I have alluded to the wariness of the old stags. I have often watched a stag on his way from the forest to water or to a salt lick or out into the open to graze.

He will approach the edge of the forest with the greatest circumspection and caution, and then wait for minutes together searching each square inch of country in front to make sure that there are no enemies in it, and snuff the air with equal closeness and care. He may then move forward a few steps and then commence the same performance over again.

Wonderful is the patience and extreme wariness of an old stag. He resembles the bison in this respect, and as years pass and his head becomes heavier and so much the more worth having, so does his wariness increase.

Have you ever stalked sambhar in the hilly ranges of India—over the highland plateaux of Central India or in the Siwaliks and foot hills of the great Himalayan Chain, or again up in the Ootacamund Hills or other ranges in far Madras and Bombay? It is a grand sport, and requires that he who undertakes it should be in hard condition, with a good wind and steady hand and eye.


Position of the four feet. 1/7.

Sambhar tracks.

It is almost incredible, when one considers the great size and weight and heavy build of the sambhar (a full-grown stag in good condition runs from 500 to 700 lbs.), to see for oneself the precipitous country he can get over. Down rocky slopes, little short of precipices, his trail will lead you, and up khuds that one would think were negotiable to the goat alone, and along knife edges on the saddles where a false step would drop one down uncomfortably steep slopes. In such country, clothed sparsely with stunted tree-growth or scattered bamboo clumps and a thick, coarse, usually matted grass, the sambhar, and especially the old sambhar stag, is in his element, and such are the places where he must be sought for nowadays.

I can recommend no better morning's outing for a man in good fettle than a climb for a stag in the cold weather in the Siwaliks or foot hills of the Himalaya. Your shikari, if he is worth his salt, will insist on your reaching, before dawn, a ridge or saddle from which you can get a view of several little valleys and dells, and this usually means getting off between 3 and 4 a.m. on a bitter morning with a wind blowing down from the snows fit to cut you in two. Many such pleasant reminiscences have I to look back to.

I remember one morning most vividly. I had determined on one of several unsuccessful treks after a big stag which was known to inhabit a certain area in the upper hills. Starting at 3 a.m.

with a half-light from a segment of a moon, we spent two hours in stumbling up the stony bed of a nullah, which was eventually replaced by a sambhar-run which led up to a knife-edge saddle some two miles distant. The moon proved of little use as soon as we entered the lower part of the forest, and the wind was so piercing that one could scarcely feel one's numbed fingers as one endeavoured to make use of them to aid one on that upward climb. The shikari with the rifle led on without a falter. The tribe seem to be possessed of the sight of the night denizens of the jungle, for they certainly see as well. We had climbed half up the slope when a sudden, short, frightened bark or bell almost in the shikari's face startled us. We had run into a sambhar coming down the path from the opposite direction, and the rapid beat of its hoofs proclaimed its equal fright at the encounter, though in the tenebrian darkness we could distinguish nothing. I heard the shikari grumbling to himself over the mischance, and mischance it proved to be as we afterwards found, for a subsequent examination of the tracks proved the beast to be the very one we were after. Their size was too well known in that part of the hills to leave any room for doubt. At the time I did not dream of its being the old stag. I was only annoyed at the thought that the beast might have startled the big one if he were in the neighbourhood. On reaching the knife-ridge it wanted still three-quarters of an hour to dawn, and we sat down. My word! It was bitter! One had got warm going up, but even with a thick sweater the wind from the snows pierced one to the bone. Very silent is it up here in the hour before the dawn in the winter-time. You get none of the familiar sounds which greet and welcome the approach of the sun god in the hot weather. Every thing and every one is roosting, and the sun has to rise and shed its warmth around before the feathered songster starts off to seek the early worm.

As one strained one's eyes round, at last a faint paleing of the opaque darkness made itself felt rather than seen, and soon, very soon in this Eastern land, the flanks of the opposite hills began to jump out of the obscurity, and gradually the shroud rolls off the bottoms of the little cup-shaped valleys.

This is the long-anticipated moment. Shall we be in luck to-day? Men whose fortune is good have seen one or more stags grazing within easy range to repay them for their rough climb and shortened night's rest. Shall we? The glasses come out, and every inch of the forest and grassy slopes are searched most eagerly, but all in vain. Not even a doe is visible. There is nothing for it but to tramp on. The shikari leads the way towards another water-shed, and we have our work cut out for us in following the sambhar path, the only semblance of a path in these regions. Up hill and down dale we toil, but usually on the knife-edge, for it is necessary to keep an eye on the country on both sides. That sambhar are plentiful in the locality is evidenced by the numbers of young sál and pine saplings ruthlessly girdled or barked by these animals whilst rubbing the velvet off their horns or from pure destructiveness.

We suddenly round a corner, and there, standing in the path, is a doe sambhar. At first she does not appear to notice us, and we stand like rocks, for it is too late to drop in our tracks. Soon, however, her gaze is concentrated in our direction, her ears flick forward, and again comes that startled, warning bark, and she is off in a wild, mad plunge down the steep khud, soon disappearing into a patch of forest.

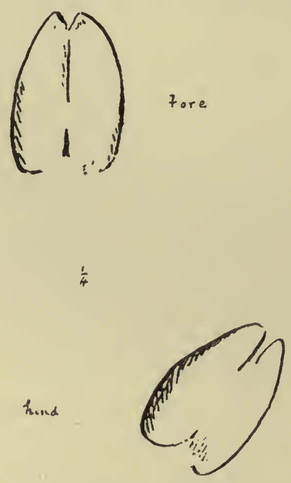
This means another trek, for there is still hope up here where the stags are so little disturbed that they may be found feeding on the open grassy sides of the little sheltered valleys until two to three hours after the sun has risen.

We change our direction, however, and strike down the khud on the opposite side of the saddle to that taken by the doe, and this means a toilsome climb up the opposite hill-side.

Towards the bottom of the little valley the slopes of the hills are covered with a fairly dense piece of forest with a stream tinkling down its centre, and here the sambhar lie up and dream lazily through the day.

As we approached the top of the opposite saddle we used the greatest circumspection, and wormed our way up on our stomachs for the last few yards.

One glance over was sufficient. A stag was feeding within 30 yards of the top, the usual knife-edge, and a first glance showed him to be a big beast. His horns also looked thick.



Sambhar tracks.

There is no time to lose on such occasions, and cocking the rifle, I pushed the muzzle over the edge and drew a sight on him. I recharged the Lee-Metford almost as I heard the bullet go home, and fired again. The sambhar dropped and disappeared down the khud. I jumped up and the shikari rose at the same moment. Being lower down than I was, he had not seen the animal drop or heard anything, and was of opinion that I had missed. We most of us know how ready these men are to consider the sahib must have done so if the animal is not dropped in its tracks. No doubt they see a good deal of missing in their time, and also have to undertake weary tramps after animals thought to be wounded but which are never regained. In this instance the khud face down which we looked was not only very sheer and rocky but went down a long way too, and absolutely nothing was visible. I was too certain that the beast was dead, however, to allow any hesitation, and we climbed down, the shikari searching the ground and grumbling, and I making straight down to where I believed the beast had rolled. It was a difficult drop, as in places the hill-side was simply a bare sheet of rock. We had got down two-thirds of the slope, finding a rough, rocky watercourse to help us, and it was in a little dry rock pool that we came upon the sambhar, which had rolled and bumped down some 250 feet or more.

The first glance at his head resulted in disappointment. It was quite small, though thick. A second glance, however, showed that there were no upper tines, only the big beam and the brow tine being present on each side, the one horn being much shorter than the other.

I depict this head here, as the shikari and other natives who saw it maintained that there are two varieties of sambhar, and that animals with heads like this form a distinct variety.

Three months later I was down in Mandla in the Central Provinces, and a shikari picked up the shed horn shown in the accompanying plate. It is much larger than my head, but also has no upper tine. The local shikari in that locality also maintained that it was a different variety.

I should be inclined to favour the supposition that the sambhar were old beasts 'going back,' i.e. that the horns as the animal grows old diminish in size and lose their upper tines. As against this theory, however, is the fact that sambhar with this kind of horn are rarely met with.

Curiosities and monstrosities are of course met with in sambhar heads as in other deer and antelope. I have a sketch of a curious head shot by Captain Willis, of the 29th Lancers. This latter may, however, be the result of a cross between a sambhar and barasingha, as it exhibits many of the characteristics of both.

For an explanation of the horn with the upper tine wanting, we seem to need more information as to the plentifulness of animals bearing such heads. It is an interesting point for shikaris.

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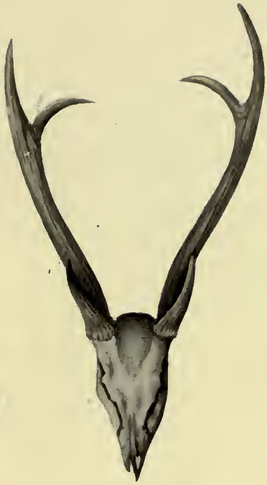
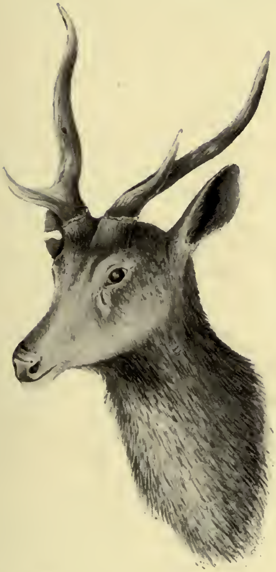
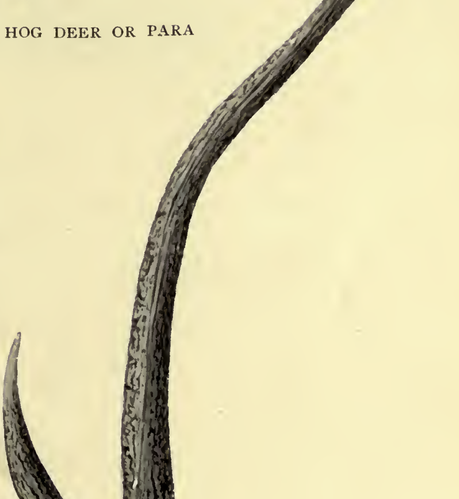


HORNS OF THE HOG DEER OR PARA



A CURIOUS SAMBHAR HEAD—
THE UPPER TINE MISSING



A HEAVY SAMBHAR HORN—
THE UPPER TINE MISSING

CHAPTER V

The hog deer—Appearance and horns—Habits—How to shoot—Shooting off the elephant in grass jungle—Difficult shots—Stalking—Tracks—Barking deer or kakar—An annoying little animal—Appearance—Curious horns—Tracks—Habits—Easy to stalk and kill—Young ones—Indian mouse deer—A tiny deer—Habits—Has no trophy.

THE HOG DEER

FOR his size the hog deer (*Cervus porcinus*) or *para,* as he is termed in the United Provinces, is a clumsy little animal resembling in many respects a sambhar *en miniature.* The height at the shoulder of this little deer is about 24 inches, and the horns are much shorter and of narrower beam than those of the sambhar, the brow antler meeting the beam at an acute angle. The horns measure only some 15 inches or so. The skin has more or less distinctly marked spots in the summer, and in some respects the animal resembles a small spotted deer; in others, as his name implies, a pig.

The hog deer is widely distributed in the Indo-Gangetic plain, from Sind and the Punjab to Assam. It is common in the Terai grass jungles, but never goes up into the hills. It is doubtful whether it is ever found in the Central Highlands of India or southwards in North Madras.

This little deer is not gregarious, being found either solitary or in twos or threes. The horns are dropped about the beginning of May usually, although the period evidently varies according to the season. The period of gestation is about eight months.

Para are usually shot either from an elephant by beating through long grass, or by stalking them in open grass areas where they may be found feeding in the early morning and late afternoon and evening. Both methods afford excellent sport.

Have you ever tried beating up hog deer on an elephant in tall grass jungle? It is great fun, and requires a quick eye. Below one in the grass are little tunnels which form the runs of the animals living in this part of the world.

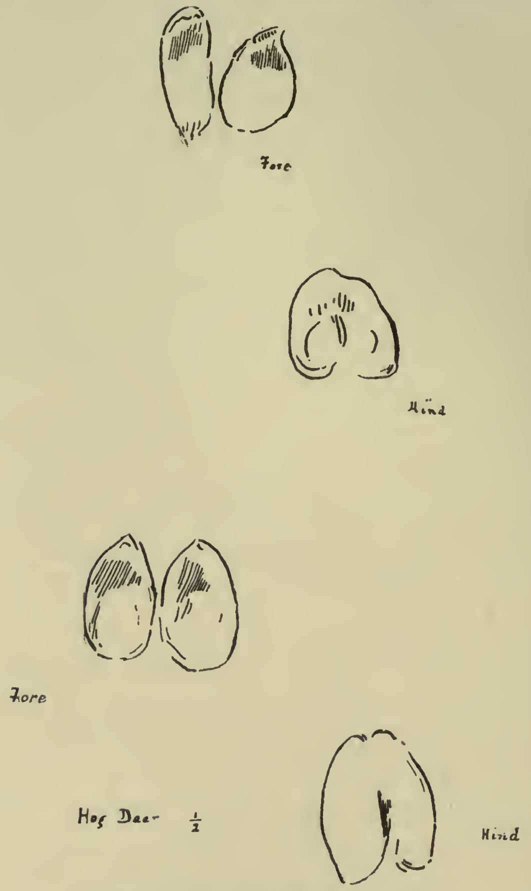
These tunnels are far too small for the elephant to make use of, and he simply forges straight ahead beating out a broad furrow in the dense grass. Suddenly a dark, yellowish, brownish shape emerges from the grass and goes skipping away in front or to the right or left rear.

It is a *para*, and before one has had time to focus the sight upon it, it has dropped into one of the tunnel runs and disappeared.

The whole thing is over in less than half a minute, and one realizes that one has seen one's first para, and that para-shooting from an elephant's back in grass may not be quite so easy as we first supposed.

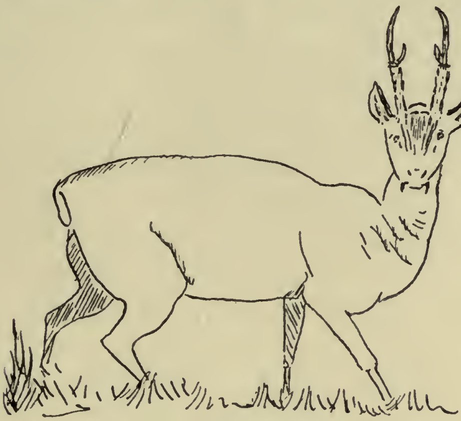
One often sees it stated that hog deer cannot be stalked. I have not found this to be so. The tracks as shown here are easily decipherable from the sambhar, chitul and barasingha by their smaller size, and are easily distinguishable from those of the kakar. I have found that on the grassy plains one finds interspersed with the sál forests in the Terai it is quite possible to stalk these little animals in the early morning and evening. At such times they are to be found out in the open close to the edges of the forest in the grass areas, and by carefully choosing the direction of approach and making use of all available cover, one can often advance to within 30 or 40 yards and secure an easy shot.

I remember one such morning in May. I was on a pad-elephant and spotted a couple of stag feeding in the open about 15 yards from the edge of a dense patch of grass. Dropping off the pad I advanced across the open with the low, level


Fore
Hind
Fore
Hog Deer ½
Hind

Tracks of the para or hog deer.

rays of the rising sun directly on my back. I actually walked erect across the short grass of the open plain to within about 80 yards of the deer, and then dropping flat down I wormed my way on my stomach to within about 30 yards and secured the better of the two heads by an easy shot from the ·303.



A kakar or barking deer.

THE BARKING DEER OR KAKAR

A funny little beggar is the barking deer, muntjac, or kakar (*Cervulus muntjac*), known as the ribbed-faced deer in the Central Provinces, and, of all names, the jungle sheep in Madras. When you put him up or startle him in the jungle he rushes off for a hundred yards or so into the nearest thick piece of scrub, and then turns round and yaps at you for all the world like a spoilt poodle.

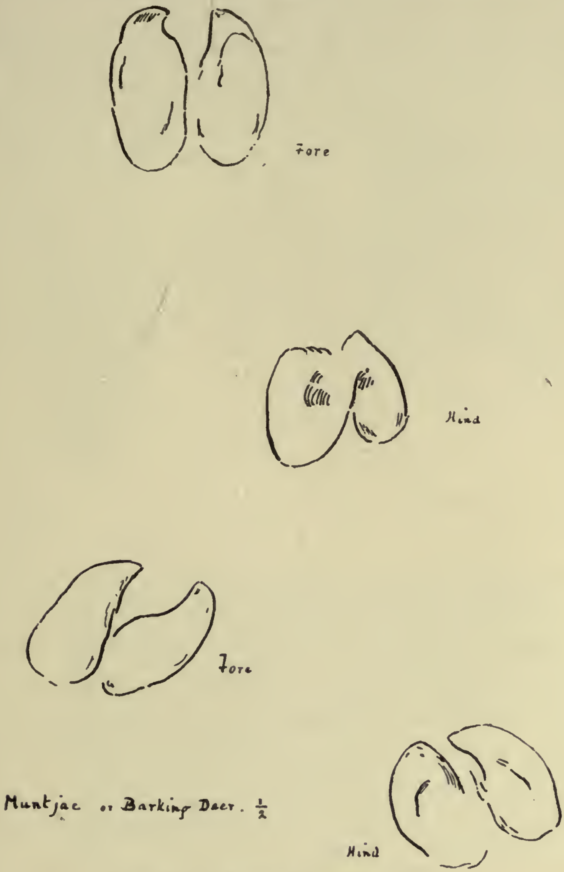
He is at times a most frightfully annoying little beggar in this way, for he wakes up the whole jungle by this irritating bark of his, and puts everything on the *qui vive*.

The kakar is a small reddish chestnut-coloured deer, low in the fore-quarters and standing only some 23 inches at the shoulder and 3 feet in length, and is thus, with one exception, the smallest of the deer tribe in India. The males weigh 40 lbs. only. Owing to his small size he moves very quietly through the jungle, and one often meets him almost face to face without having heard a sound of his approach.

This little deer has the widest range of any throughout the country, being common throughout India and Burma and ranging up into the Himalaya to an elevation of some 7000 feet.

He affords but poor sport, and with the exercise of a little trouble and patience can be easily stalked and killed. He is probably most often shot for food, as his venison is by no means bad and often affords a very welcome variety to the ordinary camp fare.

The barking deer's most striking peculiarity is situated in his horns. Above the eye a curious, erect, bony excrescence, or pedicel, covered with hair and some 3 or 4 inches in length, stands up and on this is situated the horn proper, which is forked and may be another 4–5 inches long. The record length is some 9 inches only, furry portion and horn together, and so this little deer does not yield much of a trophy. These horns drop off in May, and the new horns are perfect in August.


Fore
Hind
Fore
Muntjac or Barking Deer. ½
Hind

Tracks of kakar or barking deer.

The mouth of the kakar is worth an inspection.

Two little sharp tusks, the canine-teeth, curve downwards from the upper jaw, and when at bay it can inflict sharp wounds with these.

The little barking deer is a solitary animal, being usually found alone, though occasionally a pair will be found together. It is perhaps most commonly seen in beats, where it will be found to approach the edge of the forest in the quietest and wariest manner, not a sound betraying its presence. Then when pressed it will jump across the ride in a flash, giving only the snappiest of shots. Men often shoot them with slugs, but I personally think it more sporting to use the rifle.

The tracks are fairly easily distinguishable from those of the hog deer, as may be seen from the accompanying sketch.

The young ones are spotted, and are quite helpless for several days after birth. I found one about the middle of April, in the Terai, in a tiny form in tall grass jungle, and the little beggar though a couple of days or so old could scarcely stand.

We had put up the mother, who took up a position within 50 yards and barked away at us furiously.

One or two young ones are said to be born at a birth, the period of gestation being six months.

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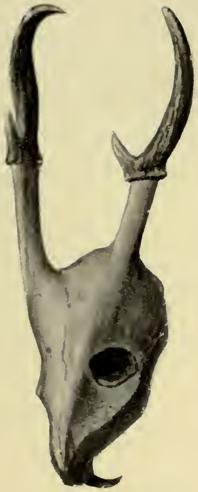


HORNS OF THE BARKING
DEER OR MUNTJAC

BOAR'S HEAD

THE BARKING DEER, KAKAR OR MUNTJAC

THE INDIAN MOUSE DEER

The little mouse deer, or chevrotain (*Tragulus minimus*), is worthy of mention here, both on account of its tiny size, it being the smallest of all Indian deer, and also owing to the fact that it is not uncommonly met with in the Central Provinces and in the forests stretching away from these down through Chota Nagpur, Orissa into Southern India, where it is found up to 2000 feet, and westward along the Western Ghats to north of Bombay.

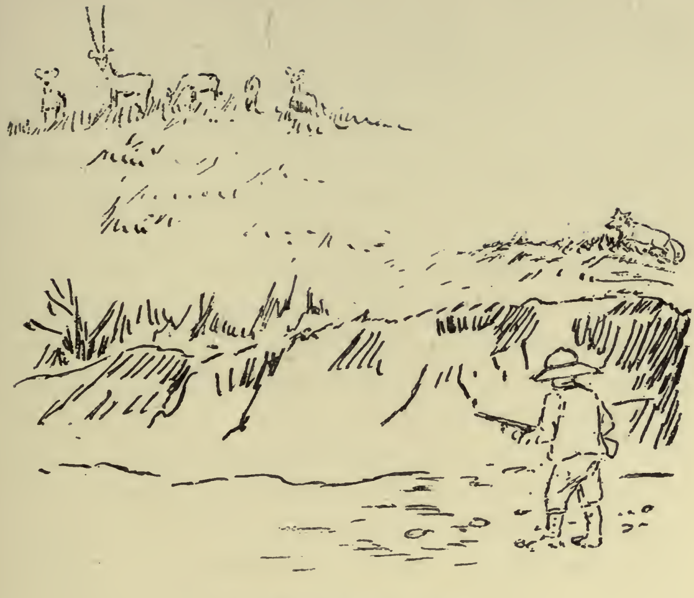
It is a tiny brown deer, minutely speckled with yellow ; the sides spotted with white or buff, the lower parts being white. There are three white stripes on the throat.

The average height of the mouse deer is 10 inches only at the shoulder, and the weight 5 to 6 lbs. only.

One often puts up this dainty little deer in grass amongst rocks or trappy, scrub-covered country, and it can be easily bowled over with a charge of No. 6.

According to the Authorities it breeds at the end of the rains—September, October. It is very easily tamed.

As the animal has no horns and thus does not form a trophy, it is rarely shot, save perhaps for the pot. One is usually, however, after more important game when it is met with, and so withholds one's fire and lets the graceful little animal pass by in safety.



CHAPTER VI

Some difficulties in stalking—Importance of knowledge of habits of animals met with—Stalking black buck—A fox intervenes—I miss the buck—Monkeys—Run into a family party—Stalk a stag chitul—The monkeys give the alarm—Lose the stag—The monkey's panchayit.

SOME DIFFICULTIES OF STALKING

MUCH could be written on the subject of that most fascinating of all methods of shooting big game in India—stalking them on foot. For we have such a variety of game in the country, and to stalk with any chance of securing a decent amount of success it is essential that the habits of the game, whether it be animal, reptile, or bird you wish to stalk, should be known to you.

One often overhears men saying in the mess or club—one has unconsciously often said it oneself : ‘ Oh, So-and-so has the most wonderful luck whenever he goes out. It’s shooting made easy with him.’

I am not prepared to say that some men are not more lucky than others. It makes for the great fascination which shikar has for so many of us that the element of luck does enter largely into the matter. But when I hear of a man’s persistent luck I always like to try and ascertain as much as he will divulge about his methods, because I have invariably found that he with the so-called ‘ persistent luck ’ is a man whose knowledge of the ways of the beasts he pursues is generally very considerable.

It is not always, however, even when armed with a good knowledge of the habits of one’s quarry that success will be attained. You will often find that in addition to knowing the habits of the game you are after, you must know those of a variety of the smaller mammals and birds who do not come within the scope of what we call ‘ game ’ nor afford trophies.

I was carefully stalking a black buck one hot-weather morning, and had every hopes of a successful and comparatively easy stalk ; for as soon as I saw the animals—there were a few does and a shootable buck—I noticed that between them and myself, and only about 50 yards from them, there was a deepish nullah.

Retracing my steps I got into the nullah at some distance above the antelope, and then commenced a careful progression down it.

We had had a couple of days' heavy rain, and the nullah, usually dry at this season, contained a considerable amount of water which gave me some trouble. Things went well, however, and on my journey I took several peeps over the edge to see how I was getting on. At one of them I spotted a fox approaching the nullah diagonally in such a manner as to render it evident that it would hit it off just above me. I at first thought of lying low, or of turning back on my tracks for a bit. Reconsidering matters, however, I thought it possible that the animal, on seeing me, would slink off rapidly down the nullah and disappear. A jackal might. A fox, I think, usually would not.

I therefore continued my course for a few yards, and then again looked over the nullah edge right, as luck would have it, into the face of the fox, he being scarcely 15 yards away.

There was a fringe of grass on the nullah bank and I do not think that fox actually saw me, but he smelt danger, and to my disgust started barking—short, sharp, snappy barks, just like those of a little pet lap-dog and as annoying. I had little doubt that it would put the black buck on the alert. There was nothing for it but to hurry on down the nullah, and this I at once started to do, wading quietly through a deep pool which I now had no time to go round.

Another peep over the edge, first backwards at the fox who was still standing on the same spot yapping away, and with his sharp muzzle pointed to the spot at which he had first discovered me. Looking ahead, I could see the black buck, but they were farther away than they had been.

Down the nullah I stole still to the accompaniment of that confounded yap, and finally came abreast of the antelope to find that the only shot I could now get was one of 100 yards. Do what I would, I could not see my way to get nearer, for they were now all fully on the alert and facing the nullah, heads up and eyes and ears wide on the *qui vive.* Also, I now had the sun, which was glancing up over the horizon, full in the eyes and on the fine sight, whose edges took on a kind of halo.

That shot was a failure! Due entirely to ignorance of what the fox would be most likely to do, and to an unnecessary attempt to hurry the stalk.

There is another animal in the jungle which it is very difficult to circumvent when he is on the *qui vive,* and that is the monkey.

How many promising stalks end in failure owing to one's having the bad luck to run into a family party of these interesting, perhaps, but to many somewhat revolting, animals.

I was on the prowl for sambhar or chitul one evening in the Central Provinces, and the sun was getting low on the horizon. We had turned campwards and were tramping through a park-like country, when suddenly we saw a herd of spotted deer near a little mud nullah or drain, such as are common in this part meandering through the grassy lands. They were some 300 yards away, and we were in doubt as to whether there was a head worth shooting amongst them when the rays of the setting sun caught and glinted on what were evidently a pair of fine antlers on one of the larger of the dark spots representing the herd, whom I had thought was a doe. Yes! there again, as he lifted his head. A fine trophy he carried. But even as we commenced to move forward, a tremendous outcry uprose in the branches of a patch of forest situated just beyond the nullah and 20 yards or so from the chitul.

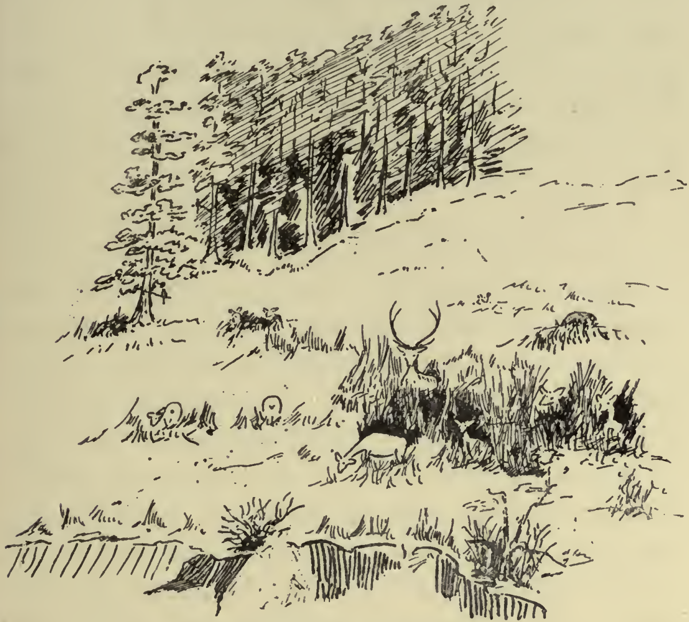
It was a family party of monkeys who had just caught sight of us.

We dropped at once, and looking back saw that by circumventing a small patch of tree jungle to our right we might be able to approach comparatively close to the deer without the monkeys spotting us. This we proceeded to attempt. We got round the forest and out at its lower end. The chitul had moved away to the left, but we could still see them in some longish grass, and we managed to reach unseen the narrow mud channel or nullah. It was much narrower and tortuous than I had imagined, and it proved most intricate work following the windings of this funny little drain. There was only just room for me to cross one foot over the other, and it wound about so continually at sharp angles and was in places so shallow that there was every likelihood of my back being seen above its banks, however low I bent.

However, calling up all the reserves of patience I possessed, I followed the shikari, who, dressed in a loin-cloth only, made light work of the passage which I found so arduous. Every now and then we took a cautious look. The deer were still there, and with them some doe sambhar apparently. Most of the chitul does were feeding, but the stag and one or two of his harem were on the *qui vive,* and an upward glance showed me those confounded monkeys.

Onward I toiled, pouring with perspiration. It was the middle of April, and any one who has endeavoured to walk several hundred yards bent double, with scarce room to cross one's feet, in the hot weather in the Central Provinces, will have the liveliest recollections of what it means, and of his own feelings during the performance.

We got to within 60–70 yards and came to a halt. It was not a nice shot, as the grass was so long that it made it imperative that I should get up the bank, which here formed a little cliff of some 5 feet in height, to get a sight on the stag. I crawled up with infinite caution. I don't think I made any noise, but the monkeys must have had a very good look out up aloft, for as I was slowly getting to my knees I heard a sharp squawk followed by bedlam broke loose above. I sprang to my feet on the instant, and had the mortifica-



The stag was on the *qui vive.*

tion to see the stag disappearing into the forest. On all sides the grass was in a seething commotion —sambhar, all does with a couple of young stags; spotted deer, and a few barasingha does, had all been feeding together in a little patch of grass not more than 50 by 70 yards square in area.

Keep your best look out for monkeys when stalking, and if they go one way in a forest, take you the opposite direction if you wish to get any sport.

THE MONKEYS' PANCHAYIT

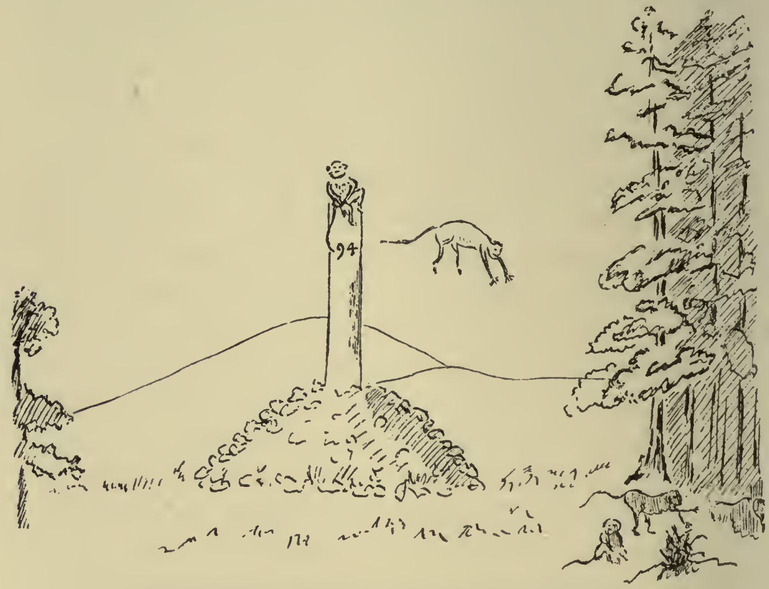
I was out early one morning in April strolling quietly along a wide forest line with the high hopes (how often do they remain hopes only!) that at last my lucky star was in the ascendant, and that I was going to get that record sambhar or chitul for which so many of us live and hope and long for. Hope long deferred maketh the heart sick, said the poet or the preacher—which was it? It may be so, but I don't think the poet could have been a shikari man, or he would never have written that, for the hopes of that "record" to many of us are very long deferred, and may be so prolonged that we find ourselves within measurable distance of that genteel poverty in the shape of a pension of a pound a day with which a munificent and paternal Government rewards many years' long and arduous service in this glorious Land of the East. Land of the aforetime Nabob and Crœsus in the English popular imagination; now exchanged for the commonly expressed opinion, 'That of all the stuck-up and aloof people on the face of the earth, commend me to the Anglo-Indian, my dear. And who is she?

'They never entertain, and live in that poky little house and give themselves airs.' The reason being, my good lady, that they who spend the best of their lives serving their country end them in genteel poverty. That is their reward for faithful service to the State.

But let us get back to our monkeys. As I was saying, although one may be nearing the end of one's years of service and still not have attained that record head, still in the heart of the true shikari the hope that the luck will come ever remains fresh and green, and each trip only makes him keener.

Strolling along meditating on this curious trait in the sportsman's character, I suddenly rounded a corner and came upon some of the large grey, long-tailed monkeys so common in these forests. He is rather an amusing beggar, this monkey, when he is at play. The present lot were not, however, at play—not by any means. They appeared to be holding a panchayit thus early in the morning, and they had chosen for the scene of their deliberations and eloquence a boundary-post—one of those stout erections one sees in the Central Provinces' forests. A great mound or cumulus of stones, embedded in which is a barked tree-trunk. The father of all the monkeys, a venerable and hoary old sinner who subsequently gave me back stare for stare and waxed most profane on my interrupting his proceedings, was perched on top of the post with his chief secretary to government, a long, spare monkey, squatting up behind him in a most uncomfortable position. For the head of the administration occupied most of the top of the post, and there was precious little room for the chief secretary. However, this occurs in the case of other beings of a more exalted rank in the animal kingdom. The more lowly members of the panchayit were grouped about in various elegant positions on the stones at the foot of the post. I took the whole thing in at a glance as I quietly rounded the corner, and the impression left on my mind was that the chief secretary and members were having an uncommonly poor time of it, and that the Old Man was walking into them over something in no measured manner. Perhaps he had been getting an urgent reminder from some one even bigger than himself, or perhaps his better half had been dressing him down. It is curious how often these strong men (and monkeys) are held in subjection by, and tremble before, their sweeter halves.

Whatever the reason, he was passing it on, and the chief secretary looked supremely unhappy, and, as remarks were snapped at him over the old man's shoulder, would have certainly preferred any lowlier station to his exalted but at present extremely undesirable position. This unhappiness was mingled with alarm on my unexpected appearance. It is not always convenient to have awkward outsiders at these deliberations. Their evidence might be eminently undesirable in that it so obviously conflicts with, and throws doubt on, the wisdom of the policy already decided upon, and which the assembly of the panchayit is a mere formal matter to satisfy troublesome thinking monkey minds. Also, it is not well that the methods by which the panchayit finally comes to an unanimous opinion should be witnessed by outsiders, who might subsequently ask strange questions. The members melted away like snow into the adjoining forest on my appearance. But I was not watching them. The Old Man, I noted, was in far too great and royal a rage to care just then for me or any one else. I noticed this. But the face to watch was that of the chief secretary. He did not dare to move before his chief, and yet to his intense alarm H.H. was not moving. All the alternations of hope, appeal, disgust, pain, fear, etc., passed in a conflicting manner across his countenance, but finally fear chased the rest away, and with a last glance of agonized appeal at his chief he emitted a screech in which respect, entreaty and apology were all commingled, and overpowered by fear took a wild leap for safety. The old chap—I beg his pardon—the head of the administration, hurled some strong invective at his lieutenant for his cowardice, and then turned the vials of his wrath in my direction, and let me have the outpourings of his soul to the full. I confess I soon began to feel as if I should fall into the same state of terrorized subjection in which he evidently kept his chief secretary and members of the panchayit if the matter was prolonged. 'And besides, the old fellow,' I reflected, 'is rousing the whole forest and staining



Overpowered by fear he took a wild leap for safety.

the purity of the glorious fresh air with his profane and intemperate language.' I continued my approach, and really you would have thought that the old gentleman was going to have a fit. He jumped about on the top of the boundary-post in the most marvellous manner, cursing me the while with his best, and it was not till I was within a few yards of the mound that he took a magnificent leap, spitting out at me as he clove the air his final benediction.

'That old fellow,' I meditated, as I continued on my way, 'for good or evil rules the roost, there is little doubt of that. His panchayit are mere puppets in his hands. Is it for the best or not ? Who can say ?'

PART II

HORNS

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CHAPTER I

Bison—The gaur and mithan—Size of horns—Habits—First experiences—The bison country—Appearance of tracks—A tropical storm—How I saw my first bull bison – I wound a bison—Back to camp in the dark—The bison country again—An early start—Face to face with a bull elephant—Run down the bull bison—Fail to bag him—Find a herd—My first bison—A long trek.

BISON

BISON tracking on foot! One of the finest, most fascinating, and most arduous of all Indian sports its devotees will tell you. And they are not far wrong! Of all the jungle denizens we have become acquainted with in India, the bison, in spite of his vast bulk, is the shyest and most timid, wariest, and the most difficult to approach.

It is not only that he is possessed of almost supernatural powers of hearing. He is also the possessor of a nose which can pick up a scent of danger at incredibly long distances away. In addition to these two acute senses, so useful to him for his self-preservation, there is the vast bulk of a mighty body surmounted by a head bearing massive horns which he makes use of when, driven to bay and perhaps sorely wounded, he charges down on his aggressor with a blind fury. The great body is supported by strong clean legs, adapted to carry him tremendous treks on end once his ever-alert senses have assured him that danger is present in his neighbourhood.

Have you ever seen a fine bull bison on his native heath—to wit, on his native hill-side, or standing in some shady bamboo-covered little river-terrace during the heat of the day—or again, when, driven to bay or hard hit, with eye flashing fire and hoof tearing up the turf beneath him, he searches eagerly round for the enemy he is so anxious to charge! Gone now are the natural shyness and timidity, for his slow temper and passions have been aroused, and he has but the one wish—common to all animals worthy of a place in the world once they are roused—to fight and to kill.

Watch the fine fellow. You cannot help admiring him, even whilst being fully aware that on the pressure of a trigger your life may in all probability hang. Coal-black is he, and standing well over seventeen hands, with a tremendously high wither and spinal arch on the back. As he stands with head thrown up, with the high, whitish yellow, hair-covered frontal bone, massive dull yellow or yellow-black horns (blunted at the points, much crinkled and corrugated at their bases, with the tips far apart—the sign of old age), coal-black body with the skin shining like satin, and four clean white stockings from the knee downwards, is he not a perfect picture and one the like of which you will see nowhere else ? Here he stands in his native wilds, and yet one would dare swear that he had just received such a grooming from the hands of adoring worshippers, as the Great Bulls of Memphis must have been given in the days of the ancient Egyptians—so clean and sleek and well-tended does he look.

An old solitary bull is he. He has done with philanderings with the softer sex, with a harem of cows ever about him to worry and bother, eat all the titbits, and perpetually set him galloping over rocky hills in the glare of the hot sun on false alarms. Quite able is he to maintain an adequate *qui vive* by himself without others to do it for him ; for warier by far than the cow is the old solitary bull.

He it is that one is ever on the look out for when bison tracking; and although one may often have to follow up the tracks of a herd in the hope of finding a decent bull in it, one is ever ready to relinquish them for the fresh ones of an old solitary bull.

The bison or gaur or gayal (*Bos gaurus*), as distinguished from the gayal or mithan, inhabits, according to Blanford, all the great hilly forest tracts of the Indian Peninsula—Assam, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula. Its extreme north-western habitat is probably the Rajpipla Hills, near Broach. It is not to be found in the grass jungles of the Gangetic plain, except near the Himalaya, and is not found in the fine Terai grass jungles of the United Provinces. In Nepal and eastwards it roams over the great grass jungles at the foot of the Himalaya. South of the Ganges it is present in Chota Nagpur, Orissa, the Northern Circars, the Central Provinces, Hyderabad territories, Mysore, and throughout the Western Ghats.

The bison inhabits forest or high grass usually in or close to hilly country, and is found either singly, as solitary bulls or dried-up cows, or in herds which may number three or four only, or may total as many as thirty animals or even more. They feed chiefly on grasses and young bamboo shoots. They cannot be termed browsers, although I have found them to eat leaves and even bark.

Large and heavy as these animals are, they move about in the hilly, precipitous country, such as is to be found in the Central Provinces and Western Ghats, for instance, with ease, climbing up and down narrow stony paths with all the apparent facility of a goat. They are possessed of tremendous powers of endurance, and when thoroughly frightened will undertake immense treks.

Burke gives the average horn measurement as 2 feet 7 inches, the maximum at 41½ inches. Colonel Pollok would appear to hold the record with 6 feet 10½ inches. Anything over 40 inches is seldom met with now-a-days.

The period of gestation appears to be still a matter of dispute. Breeding is said to take place in the cold weather; and in the Peninsula of India, according to Blanford, calves are mostly born in August or September, and a few early in April, May, or June.

The animals are apparently subject to many of the diseases of domestic cattle, and a kind of anthrax at times decimates them, as was the case in Mysore in 1903, when both bison, sambhar, and elephants were found dead in the jungles in considerable numbers.

The *mithan* is similar to the *gaur*, its most marked difference being in the very different skull and horns it possesses as shown here. The head is shorter with shorter nasala; the forehead quite flat, and the transverse outline of the vertex between the horn cores straight and not arched. The horns are blackish throughout and are nearly straight, spreading outwards and directed more or less upwards at the tips, but not inwards. They average 11 inches. Mr. E. Stuart Baker holds a record with 22¾ inch. The animal is smaller than the *gaur*, and it is not difficult to distinguish between them.

The history and distribution of the *mithan* have been matters of considerable dispute for years.

All are agreed that tame *mithan* are to be found in the possession of the inhabitants of the Tippirah Hills, and in the hills both north and south of the Assam Valley. I have seen many tame animals in the South Lushai Hills and Chittagong hill-tracts, and even in villages in the Chittagong Collectorate. I am also of opinion that the animal undoubtedly exists in a wild state in these latter areas, and the villagers will be found to endorse this opinion. I have also shot the *gaur* in the Chittagong Collectorate hill-forests and in the Chittagong hill-tracts.

The *mithan* is also supposed to extend down into Burma and Tenasserim, through the Arrakan hill-tracts, where it is undoubtedly to be found in a domesticated state.

The *mithan* breeds freely with the humped cattle, and domesticated animals may be found with the village herds out in the forest. The

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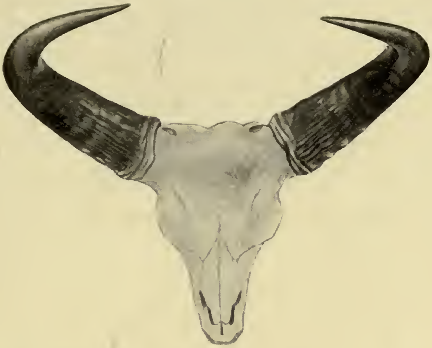
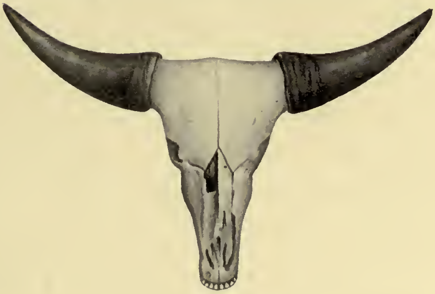
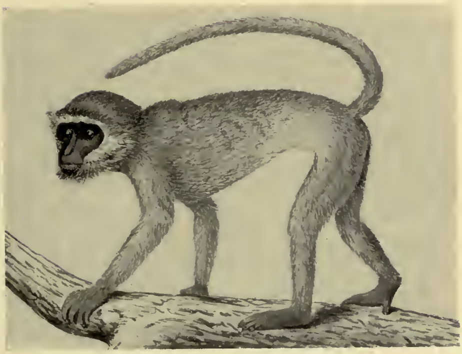


HORNS OF INDIAN BISON OR GAUR



HORNS OF THE MITHAN



THE LUNGOOR MONKEY

period of gestation appears to be still open to dispute.

FIRST EXPERIENCES WITH BISON

Well do I remember the first time I came within measurable distance of seeing my first bison. It was my first year in India, and I was out in the fine jungles of Chota Nagpur in July risking with equanimity a bad dose of malarial fever, in the keenness which was prepared to face any amount of discomfort in an effort to bag a bison.

I was encamped alone in a wild part of the country, some seventy miles from the station; and two days' heavy and incessant rain had kept me a prisoner near the tents, my sole occupation being an endeavour to induce some queer-looking fish to leave their watery abode for my frying-pan.

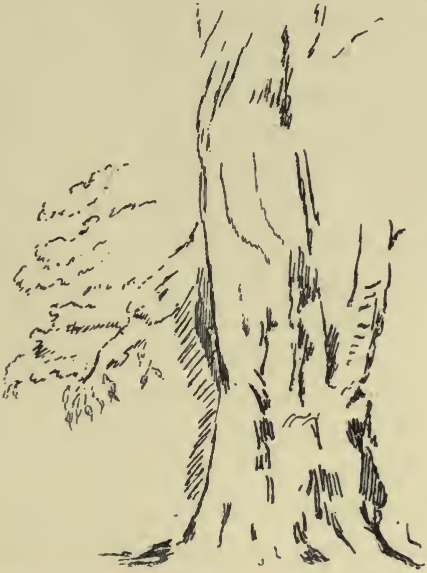
The third morning the usual call at 4 o'clock found that the fates were propitious. It was starlight and fine, and Bishu the shikari said that we should get off as soon as possible. Tumbling into shikar kit, and swallowing a substantial chota hazari, I climbed into the saddle, for I found I could ride a couple of miles or so, and we set out. Our party consisted of Bishu, the head shikari (one of the very best trackers I have ever known), his assistant, who came near to rivalling his master, and a couple of coolies to carry the luncheon-basket and cartridge-bags.

As I rode along in the freshness of early morning my spirits rose, and my hopes ran high that at last most persistent ill-luck would have a change, and that perseverance would meet its reward. The track was a vile one, and the mare had to pick her way carefully down a trappy hill and cross a stony-bedded river in half flood. As it was still dark this was a matter of no small difficulty, and I am nearly let into the river before we get across and on to the path beyond.

And now pale gleams are seen in the east, rapidly broadening, for this is an Indian sunrise, and out here we don't soften things. Transitions are sharp, and from tartarean gloom we leap to the glorious brightness of day. See how yonder forest-clad hill, but now so gloomy and silent, is lighting up. Watch the shadows swiftly flying from the hill-tops to the valleys beneath, quickly pursued by vedettes from Aurora's chariot.

In the valley trees and objects are leaping out of the obscurity. The whole east is aglow, and the sun has commenced to shine on another ' long, long Indian day.'

The path winds its way between the hills, covered with forest and a thick, tangled matting of creepers and undergrowth. On either side bamboo clumps and brakes appear at intervals, the feathery tops of this beautiful plant gracefully dipping over the path. A little farther on down this path, which ends abruptly some three miles ahead in the Government Reserved Forest, we come to a giant pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*). With the glory of the morning light on its buttressed silvery trunk and long-pointed crimson leaves (for they are still young), it is indeed a beautiful object. We are here at the edge of a pretty hill-stream, and



A giant pipal tree with its buttressed silvery trunk.

dismounting, the pony is sent back to camp, and we cross the stream and proceed in a south-easterly direction, intending to make for the Kuilibrum Hill, unless we come upon fresh tracks before. After a walk of a couple of miles we reach a small pool, and round this there were many marks of bison, showing that a herd had been there, but not recently. In fact, I was soon given to understand that, owing to the heavy rain of the past few days, tracking would be very difficult work unless we came upon tracks made after the rain had ceased. It must have been somewhere about six o'clock or a little later when we left the pool and headed for the hill, having decided to follow the tracks of three bison which had made off in this direction the day before. So Bishu said—though I was at a loss to understand how he arrived at this conclusion. [As an instance of the marvellous tracking powers of these men I may quote here the following. One hot weather we were on a barren trappy hillside of rock. I asked Bishu how he could possibly say the bison had gone over that way. He pointed to a small piece of stone. I picked it up, and could just see that it was *slightly darker* on the face which lay uppermost. It had been turned over by the bison's hoof shortly before. This was tracking!] The ground soon became difficult, and we had some very severe climbing, not so much on account of the elevation of the hills as owing to their stony nature. We advanced in this way for an hour or so, the tracks at last leading into a lovely valley, in which we hoped the animals would have stopped to feed for some time. My eye, still comparatively new to the Indian forest, and more especially to the Indian forest in the rains, was delighted by some fine sál trees of enormous growth and girth, but growth of all kinds was present. A stream ran down the centre of the valley, and on its banks were seen the stately banyan, the beautiful pipal, and brakes of the feathery bamboo. The whole valley lay in a flood of golden sunlight, and one could not but pause to admire the prospect whilst the shikaris hunted for the tracks of the animals we were following or for fresher ones. The valley was not very wide, and immediately in front rose a very stony hill, which I mentally prayed I might not have to climb. The shikaris soon returned, and reported that there were no fresh tracks, and that our old ones led up the stony hill, and so up we went. When approaching the summit we came upon a small footpath or rough track made by wild animals, trending round the hill, and this path the bison had followed. We proceeded in their footsteps over frightfully rocky ground. I found negotiating large boulders, encumbered by a heavy rifle (for one should carry one's weapon when bison-tracking, as one rarely knows when one may get a snap shot), pretty heavy work under the rays of a July sun. The trail led down the hill, and we finally found ourselves in a rocky nullah bed, along which we toiled. The sun was very powerful, and I was grateful for the shade the trees growing here afforded. The ravine soon branched, and a consultation took place. The bison had here separated, two going off in the branch which, so I was told, finally headed off in a westerly direction, and the third up the other branch. We determined to follow the latter.

At about 9 a.m. we reached the top of an outer spur of Kuilibrum, and here a few minutes' breathing space were taken.

I determined to make straight for the summit of the Kuilibrum, and from that height take a good look round at the surrounding country. The final climb up of some 500 feet was almost vertical and very stiff work. I was well rewarded, however, as a glorious view of the surrounding country was obtained. Those who have toured through and shot through the beautiful jungles of the Central Provinces and Chota Nagpur have rarely anything but praise for this magnificent country. Out in the plains and elevated plateaux, which run from a few hundred square yards to a varying number of square miles in extent, one finds oneself ever in sight of the rolling tops of the surrounding hills which edge the horizon either in soft, smooth topped lines, or jut up in isolated but ever rounded or dome-shaped masses.

Forests clothe most of these hills with a beautiful luxuriance, little verdure-filled valleys winding in and out between the forest-clad or trappy barren hill-sides, and in these valleys one will ever have with one the tinkling sound of some purling brook. The hill-ranges at times run up to elevations of several thousand feet, the cultivated or forest-clad plateau or tableland itself being about 1000 or so, whilst isolated peaks may reach 3000 feet or more. This was the case with Kuilibrum, the peak I now stood upon. There at my feet lay the forest I had just come through, looking as flat as a pancake, and yet one knew it for a network of stony hills. Out yonder a white speck is gleaming in the sunshine amidst a sea of deep green. It is a small forest rest-house many miles away. All round the horizon hills are piled up in a picturesque confusion, and in the blue haze of the distance can be seen the great range on which lies the Ranchi plateau and the headquarters of the Commissioner who rules over this wild country.

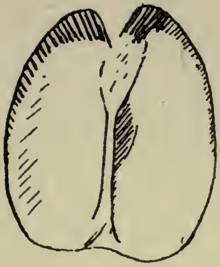
I carefully sweep all the near spurs of Kuilibrum for bison, but without success. We proceed eastwards along the ridge. Suddenly my rifle goes up mechanically. What is that springing along some 60 yards ahead? I only get a glimpse, but think it is a deer. The shikari touches my arm, and I see that I have mistaken a *lungoor,* a monkey standing some 4 feet high, for a deer. I soon see that we have disturbed a family party, and their loud whoops resound through the forest. Big, heavy, greyish fellows these, with enormously long, powerful arms and tails. They soon take to the trees, and the noise is tremendous.

I now decided to halt and have a little lunch and a rest to recoup my somewhat jaded energies.

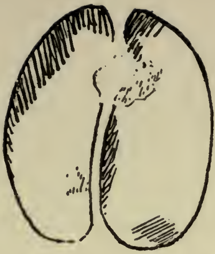
We had been going nearly seven hours, and that in the greenhouse temperature of a sunny July day in this part of the world.

At noon we are again on our feet, and strike eastwards down a prominent spur of this range for the country beneath. I was following Bishu down the steep slope, when he suddenly jumped aside and lifted one foot. I had already stepped in his tracks, but skipped out of them with promptitude. He had been bitten on the instep by a snake. The brute, some 3 feet in length, was not apparently a dangerous one (my knowledge of the reptilia was at the time insufficient to enable me to determine this), as Bishu, picking a leaf of some low herbaceous plant, rubbed the drop or two of blood from his instep and held on his way. The heavy shooting-boots and gaiters I, in my ignorance, wore in my griffin days when stalking, as at other times, had protected me, though I had trodden heavily on the snake. Sambhar skin uppers and rope soles are, by the way, the boots for stalking-work in the country I am describing, save in the rains, when rubber soles or a light pair of ‘ footer ’ boots are necessary. Rope soles are, of course, useless in the wet.

At the base of this spur we came upon a great mound of rubbish, with a small burrow in it. I could not imagine what on earth it could be, and in my thirst for knowledge of all jungle lore I turned to Bishu. He told me it was a wild boar’s



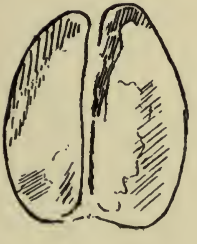
Left fore



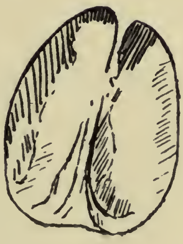
Right fore

Tracks of Indian Bison or Gaur . $\frac{1}{4}$.

Left hind



Right hind



lair. Curiously enough he was not at home. We prodded and routed it about to enable me to examine the abode thoroughly. Piggy makes it, in order to enable him to snooze away the hot part of the day, with a snug thatch roof over him to keep off the hot rays of the sun and the heavy rain of the monsoon. The accommodation is somewhat cramped, however, and one could not help but surmise that the atmosphere inside must get somewhat stuffy. The shikaris, as soon as we got off the steep slopes, started in earnest to look for fresh tracks, and after half an hour's work they found the trail of an old bull. Quite fresh it appeared, and we took it up, only the trackers and myself, the rest of the men being left behind. To my inexperienced eye these tracks looked like those of an ordinary cow; they are, however, rounder, larger and less pointed in front. I show them in the sketch overleaf. Now I saw my men really at work. Every mark was considered carefully between them, but quite silently. The green shoots of bamboos and jungle trees and shrubs on each side of the trail were closely and critically examined, in order to judge of the amount and freshness of the sap oozing from cropped parts, and thus enable an estimate to be formed of the time at which the bison passed the spot. Not a word was spoken; signs being the only language. For a couple of miles the tracking was very easy, and I moved along in momentary expectation of seeing a giant form get up in front.

We had now dipped into a little valley, and begun to breast a rocky hill. The marks were so fresh that we all fully expected to see the beast when we reached the summit, which we approached on our stomachs. To say that I was excited is to put the matter mildly. I thought they could all hear my heart going like a sledge-hammer against my ribs.

On reaching the crest I found that the ground dipped away into a valley covered with a thick vegetation, and careful observation showed that the bison's tracks led straight down into this valley. We went quietly down the slope, entered the dense jungle, and proceeded cautiously.

In every thicket I thought I saw the horns of a bison, and for the next hour and a half as we followed the tracks down the valley my senses were kept on the *qui vive*.

The tracks of the bull were so fresh that Bishu thought we should run into him at any moment, and my hopes were high of at last satisfying my ambition and meeting a bull bison face to face.

I had been so intensely interested in the tracking work that I had paid scant attention to anything else, and had not noticed the change in the weather. A loud clap of thunder first drew my attention to the fact that the sun had disappeared, and that the sky was overcast. I looked hurriedly up. Could anything be more aggravating! Here was the cup almost, if not quite, at my lips, and yet it seemed as if it was to be dashed away at the moment of seeming success.

Kuilibrum was hidden in the darkest and most threatening storm-cloud I had looked upon. All the horizon behind me was a deep, gloomy, slate colour; and as I looked a blaze of fire flashed athwart the dark glowering mass, and the artillery of heaven opened in a deep-toned roar, which echoed and re-echoed amongst the hills until the whole earth seemed to be quivering and responding to the vibrations. 'Twas magnificent, but to me, on the verge of seeing, and as I hoped of bagging, my first bison, it appeared the cruellest luck. It was only too obvious that the flood-gates would soon open upon us, and then good-bye to our chance of seeing the bison. My fears were soon realized. A spot containing about a pint of water fell on my nose, a second containing about a quart, and the sluices of heaven were opened. I was wet through in the first minute. 'We talk about rain at home,' I muttered. 'We only have fine mist there.' We plodded along on the tracks, as I was determined to stick to them as long as possible; but after half an hour, by which time the waterspouts lessened a little, we had to give it up. We were on the side of another stony hill, and tracking was hopeless with water pouring down in miniature watercourses at every step.

With a groan of disgust I heard the shikaris say it was no good. Three hours over the most abominable ground on as hot a trail as the keenest could wish for, and all for nothing !

'How far to the tents ?' I briefly asked. 'Three miles,' was the reply. I was surprised, as I had not thought the trail headed so straight for home. However, being still green and young, I took the information at its face-value, and we started off. Needless to say, I had travelled over a good eight miles before I reached the tents, Bishu keeping diplomatically in the rear as the three miles lengthened into four, five, six, and seven !

I reached camp fairly dead beat at 6 p.m., having been out over thirteen hours.

I had two other days out that July—both unsuccessful, owing to the incessant heavy rain, and then had to return to the station. It was not till the following hot weather that I was destined to see my first bull bison in his native wilds.

HOW I SAW MY FIRST BULL BISON

It was early in March that work took me into the bison country again, and one morning, Bishu, the tracker, self, and the usual two followers, left the camp, which was being struck to march that day, as the first streaks of dawn were tingeing the sky red.

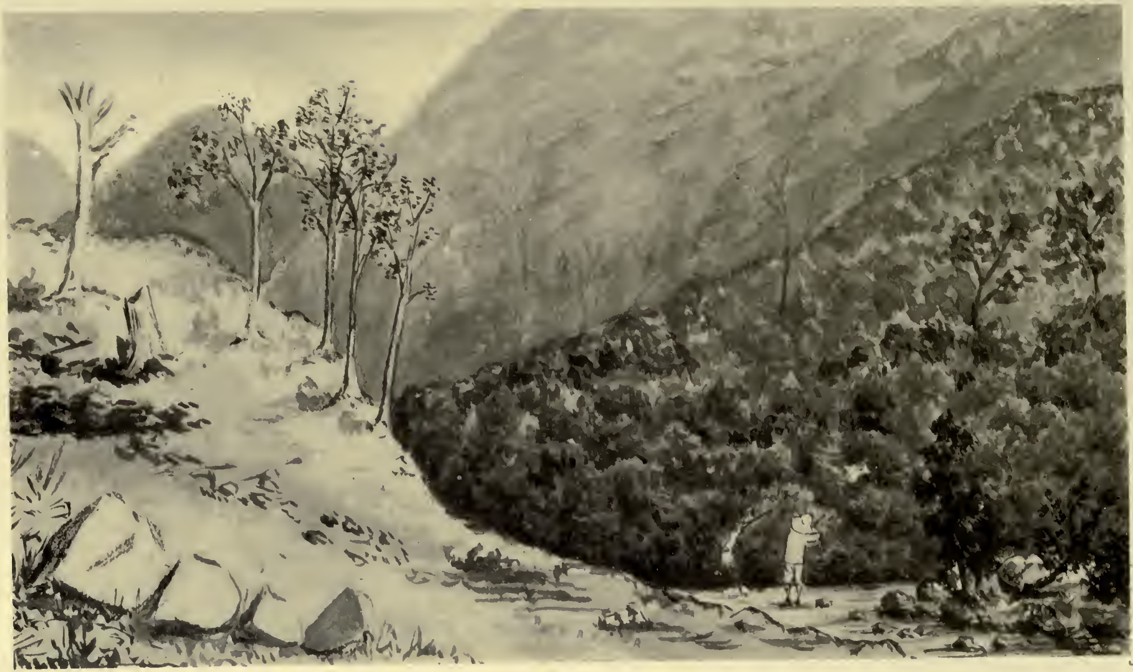
We went due east, as I wished to climb the Dindaburu Hill, 2480 feet in height, to have a look at the surrounding forest from that elevated post. After proceeding for about an hour we picked up the tracks of a bison who had passed the preceding night. After following these for some time we had to give them up, as they led in the opposite direction to that in which we had to go. A sambhar's fresh tracks did likewise, and the next three hours proved uneventful.

We had now reached the outer slopes of Dindaburu, and began to wind up round the hill. Tracks of game abounded in every direction, and bison were evidently numerous in the locality. Pea-fowl and a few monkeys were all we saw, however, and we reached the summit at 11.30. The view was not as good as I had hoped for, as the summit was partially clothed with trees. We came up along a watershed, and this we found divided, giving two separate peaks with a steepish valley between them. I lunched here, and we then set off down the slope again. We had dropped down the first steep portion, and I was engaged in making notes on the forest here, when a 'hist!' from Bishu made me drop pencil, tape, and notebook and seize the rifle. I looked round to see him glaring ahead and making frantic signals for silence. We squatted, and he crawled ahead.

When 30–40 yards away he turned and eagerly beckoned me forward with a wide grin on his face. I now had a very bad three minutes, endeavouring to walk like a fairy in huge shooting-boots over dry, crackling leaves. Suddenly, before I had gone more than half-way, I heard a short, sharp, snappy, barking roar, followed by a rush and smashing of twigs, and then silence. I saw nothing, but knew instinctively that it must be a bison. The beast had made off over a hill in front, and we at once started to skirt it, Bishu gliding along like a snake, and I feeling as if I was an elephant moving through the jungle. On rounding the hill I found Bishu, who had got ahead, in the bed of a small nullah, beckoning to me frantically, again with the well-known grin on his features. I advanced very slowly and quietly, and as I did so heard a movement in the low jungle on the opposite side of the ravine. I glanced eagerly at the place, and there was the outline of the upper part of a great black mass with two yellow-black horns slowly moving up the hill-side. My heart jumped into my mouth as I saw my first bison, a fine old bull, in front of me. The bull stopped diagonally on offering a fair shoulder shot. Did I gaze at the glorious sight one instant too long, or was it only the excited state of my nerves ? Who knows ? I raised the rifle and sighted on the shoulder. Before I could press the trigger the bull turned towards me, head on—then suddenly wheeled round and bolted. The low jungle was fairly thick, but I fired. We both rushed madly forward. It will have been gathered that I was a tyro at the game, and Bishu had completely lost his head. Fear and he were strangers. The bison had plunged ahead at the shot, and we dropped into a small offshoot nullah, hoping that if badly wounded it would cross this higher up. In this we were disappointed, and at Bishu's insistence we returned to the spot where the bison had stood as I fired. This we found to be 110 yards from my own position, but I had little to be proud of at missing.

What a glorious beast he was as I first got sight of him! A grand head with massive horns glistening almost white in the sunlight, and a black glossy coat which shone like the satin coat of some blue-blooded racehorse. On reaching the spot where he had stood, we commenced searching for blood. Bishu maintained I had hit an intervening twig and gone above the bison. I hoped not, but after a careful search I was forced to allow I had missed.

Of course, I was eager to follow up. I was told it was useless, but it was unlikely that young hot blood and ignorance would listen to this. It was about 2 p.m. when I fired at the bull. We followed his tracks for about 2½ hours. The shikaris then gave it up and said it was useless going on, the more so that the trail led in the opposite direction



W. C. Fasson, del.

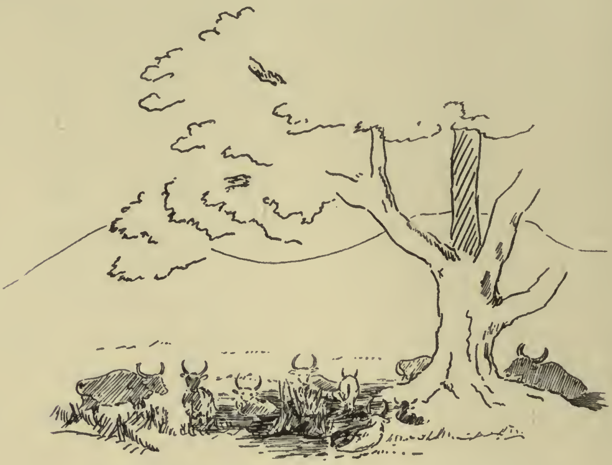
THE BULL STOPPED DIAGONALLY ON OFFERING A FAIR SHOULDER SHOT

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

to the place in which our camp, which was moving that day, had orders to pitch at. He said we were a good 6–8 miles away from camp, and his estimate turned out to be fairly correct. We picked up the camp at 6.30, I in a very cast-down frame of mind at having missed my first bison.

It was but a couple of days or so later, and whilst on the same trip, that I wounded a bison. We had started before dawn, as usual, and had followed the trail of a couple of bison all the morning. At about 11.30 we found ourselves on the summit of a watershed, from which a fine view of the surrounding forest-clad hills and cultivated plateaux was obtainable. I elected to stop here and lunch. We got on the move again before 1 p.m., and following down the slope of the watershed, Bishu suddenly dropped like a stone. I did the same, and for a minute no movement was made. Then Bishu wormed his way a yard or two forward, and peered over the far side of the crest we were on. He waved me forward, and on reaching him, there below me was a herd of bison taking their midday siesta under a fine old mango tree. They looked just like a herd of cattle in the old country. Some were seated, others standing up flicking off the flies with the brushes at the ends of their long tails whilst they chewed the cud. Some of the youngsters were wandering about in that restless fashion common to youngsters of all species of mammals.

My eyes grew actually dim with excitement at the sight below me. At last I had beneath me that which I had covered so many miles and faced a considerable amount of hardship to see. Here was a whole herd of the animals in the wild, free forest!



A herd of bison under a fine old mango tree.

It was difficult to realize that they were really true wild bison who would be off at the slightest suspicion of danger. With the remembrance of the old bull of a few days before in my mind, I did not wish to wait too long. A glance of inquiry at Bishu, and he pointed out to me the beast to fire at, for my experience was not sufficient at that time to enable me to pick out the bulls from the cows from my position—at all times a difficult matter in jungle. Raising the rifle, I took a careful sight on the animal and fired, and got in a second barrel as the beast started forward. We dashed at a breakneck pace down the hill, got into the 4 feet high grass at the bottom, which filled the little terrace upon which the mango tree stood, and ran plump into a bison coming in our direction. I had reloaded as I ran down the hill, and fired point-blank at this beast at a distance of less than 10 yards. My shot had the effect of turning him, and he made off in the wake of the retreating herd which, after scattering in all directions, appeared from the noise ahead to be closing up as they breasted at a great pace a scrub jungle-covered slope in front.

This time I had no doubts, as I felt certain I had not missed. One of the two shots I fired from the crest had palpably missed the bison—gone over him. I had not allowed for the difficulty of firing down at objects almost directly below one, and committed the usual tyro's mistake.

The trackers soon found blood, and in plenty, and telling the lunch-basket carriers to remain about 100 yards behind us, we took up the trail. Often do I look back to the afternoon that followed. One of the most exciting and yet most aggravating of the many exciting hours I have passed in the Indian jungle! Hour after hour through the long afternoon we followed that blood trail, every moment expecting to come upon the bison or to receive a charge on our flank. For a long way the tracks were easy to follow. Then the blood began to grow scarcer ; but even then Bishu maintained that the bison was badly hit, and that we should get him all right. And so on, till the shadows lengthened, the sun dropped behind a neighbouring hill-crest, the west flamed red and orange, pale yellow and green, and then turned to grey, and we were in the dark. In the dark, miles away from camp, and with but a scant idea of the distance we were separated from it ! My feelings will not admit of description at this termination of my second view of bison. Not for one moment during the afternoon had a thought of faltering entered my head. I felt as certain that I should get that bison as one is of picking up a rabbit one has knocked over in the fallow at home. And this was the end ! As soon as it was evident to me even that we should have to give it up, I handed over the rifle to Bishu, and from keen alertness my muscles relaxed and I felt dog-tired.

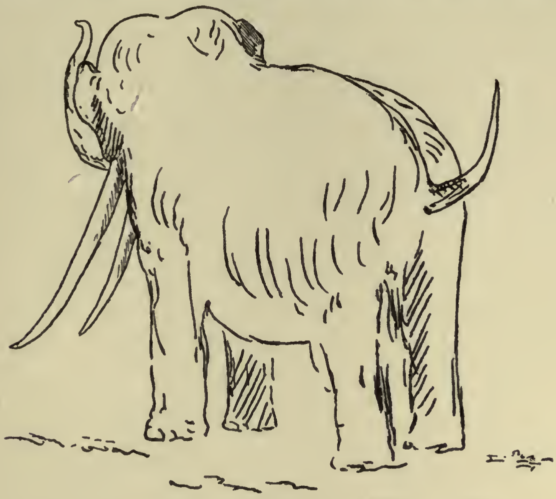
That tramp back ! It remains in my memory as a terrible nightmare. On and on and on I stumbled after the shikaris. Often they lost their way or appeared to be doubtful of it. Through ravines, over stony hills, through bamboo brakes and scrub jungle we blundered along, and it was nearly 3 a.m. before we reached the camp. I was done brown, as the expression goes, having been on my feet for the best part of twenty hours. A cup of soup, and my boots and coat off, and I dropped like a log, fast asleep, too weary to remember my disappointment and disgust over the loss of the bison.

It was nearly two months later that I finally bagged my first bison. It was in the piping hot month of May, and I had been sent out by my chief to accompany Colonel ——, who, having shot every animal in Asia save bison, wished to add this trophy to his collection. A nicer outing and a better sportsman I have rarely had or met. It was this true sportsman-like spirit which cost him the first bison he had ever set eyes on. Having reached the bison country, we left before dawn next morning, having arranged to keep together. Just as it was getting light one of the trackers stopped and muttered 'hathi.' We looked about, and there, climbing out of a narrow ditch or nullah, was a fine elephant with a pair of magnificent tusks. He had not seen us, and went off, skirting a low, rocky hill in the direction opposite to the one we were moving in. At the time we were on the tracks of four bison, but they were not fresh ones. Shortly after meeting the elephant we picked up the fresh tracks of what, according to Bishu, was a fine bull.

We plodded along upon these for some three or four hours, and were moving slowly along an elephant path up a little valley, when the same tracker who had previously spoken dropped back and whispered, ‘hathi.’ The path we were on ran up a small river-terrace bounded by hills and with the stream running on one side, the banks being densely clothed with bamboo clumps. The terrace itself was covered with the coarse tussocky ‘sabai,’ or ‘babar’ grass, with a few scattered sál trees here and there. At the tracker's whisper we looked up, and there coming down the elephant track, some 150 yards off, was an elephant. We halted and watched him. Slowly he approached us, totally unaware of our presence, picking up the red earth and sand from the path with the tip of his trunk and chucking it over his back. It looked exactly as if a small red hill or gigantic termite heap was moving towards us.

As he still continued to approach and gave no sign of having winded us, we got off the path and stood behind four small stunted sál trees which happened to grow close to it. The trackers and lunch coolie were placed behind, and we slipped cartridges into our rifles. We were luckily heavily armed; but the regulations laid down on the Colonel's shooting permit against shooting elephants were strict and plain, and he thought it necessary, probably seeing my eagerness, to remind me that he at any rate was not allowed to fire at elephants. No more was I for that matter, but I had not his years over my head.

On came the huge animal, and we soon saw that it was our friend of the morning again. There was no mistaking those tusks. I doubt if I shall ever see a finer pair. So great was their length that it almost looked as if it was necessary for the animal to keep its head up to prevent their catching the ground and tripping him. Truly he was a lordly beast as he advanced, and I found myself almost praying that a shot might be necessary.



The elephant stood the very embodiment of vigilance.

That elephant came on absolutely unconsciously, until we computed that six strides would bring him into the middle of us.

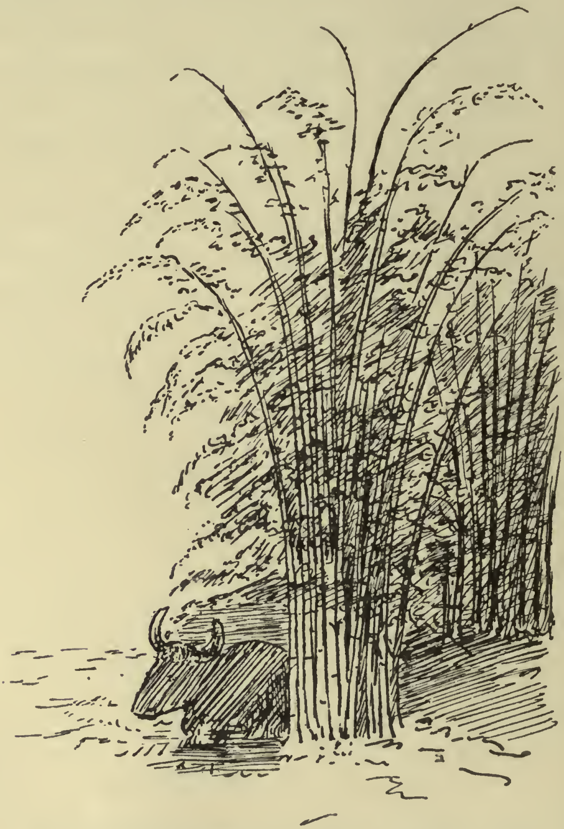
He then came to a sudden halt. Forward came the ears in a great flap and up went the trunk, and he stood the very embodiment of vigilance, and, so it appeared to my acutely strung senses, of mischief as well. I was directly facing him, my rifle up at the shoulder. The Colonel was a little to my left so as to be able to get a side shot if necessary; and Bishu, the plucky Bishu, armed with his tiny axe, was a pace or two to my right rear. So we all stood, for what to me seemed an interminable space of time. Probably it was at most half a minute. I spent the period in regretting I had not fired sooner—Colonel or no Colonel, rules or no rules. We were not paid to risk our lives from wandering wild animals whom rules protected. Our good luck (or was it bad luck!) was with us, however, for after standing like a statue for the half-minute, the great beast spun round like a teetotum and went crashing off through the grass, through the bamboo-shaded stream, and up an opposite hill-side before one had realized that he was not going to charge. I must say that we all heaved great sighs of relief when the tension was over; but I for one remained bitterly disappointed at not having had a shot. There is little doubt (and so I was told afterwards by my chief) that we should not have made the mistake in letting him get so close. Had he charged from where he was, the odds are that he must have got one of us. None of the coolies had bolted. They were all just behind us, and if he had not bagged one at the first rush, the little terrace was far too exposed to have given us much chance in a game of hide-and-seek with a wounded and infuriated bull elephant.

As I look back I remember this meeting as one of the most interesting episodes, as it certainly was one of the happiest, I have had in my jungle career.

Within the hour we ran the bull bison to earth in a bamboo brake upon this same stream, and it was only when fairly close up that I discovered that the Colonel was bent upon tossing for first shot. As he was the visitor I point-blank refused, and the minute it took to convince him, and the slight noise we probably made during the wrangle, cost us that bison plus a long weary tramp. The Colonel crawled slowly forward. It was a nasty place to try a stalk in. Suddenly I heard the well-known snorting bark, a great crash as the animal lunged forward in the bamboos, and the beast was away.

The Colonel told me that he had seen a black patch, but not knowing what part of the animal it was, or even that it was the animal for certain, he had not cared to fire. As a matter of fact, he believed afterwards that the patch he saw would have given him a shoulder shot! Such is luck!

The next day was a red-letter day for me. We left early as usual, and after being less than an hour out from camp we came upon the fresh tracks of a herd which had passed in the night. We followed very slowly for about an hour, and



We ran the bull bison to earth in a bamboo brake.

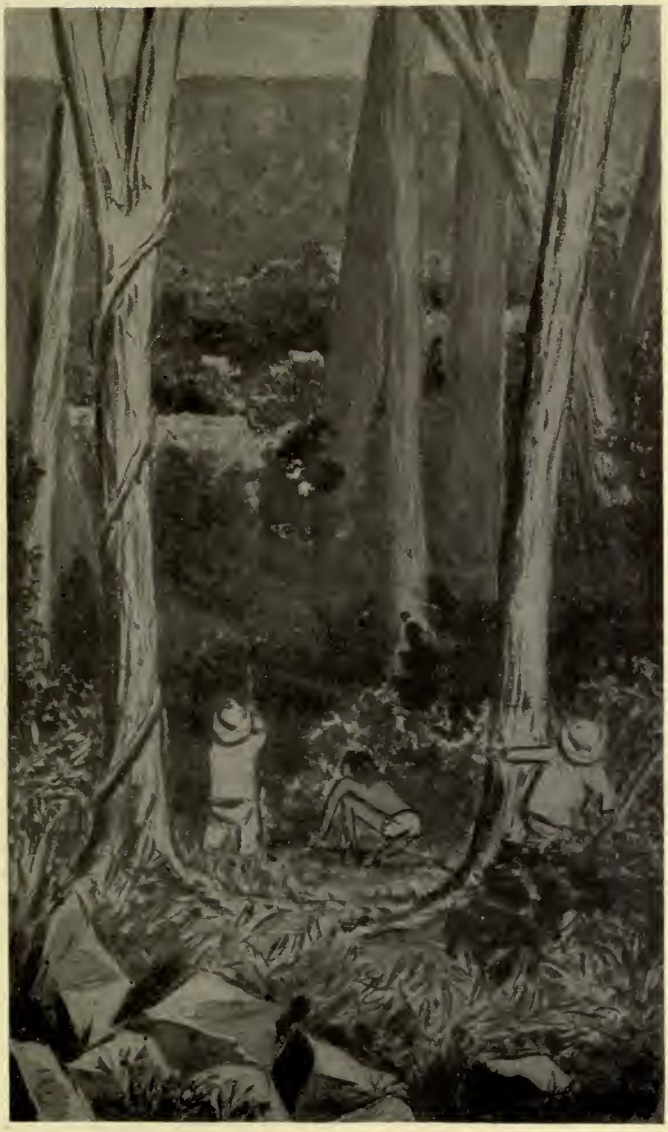
then Bishu signified that they were upon an opposite fairly open slope. We were ourselves in fairly dense sál forest. We stopped, carried on a hurried consultation, at the end of which we sat down, and Bishu went on ahead alone to ascertain the exact whereabouts of the herd, and especially of stragglers. He soon returned and told us to take a rifle apiece only and come along, the rest of the men being left behind. We followed warily and very slowly in Bishu's tracks, and at last approached near the edge of the forest, which ended a little way up the opposite rocky slope which was covered with stunted bushes and grass only. The herd was scattered over this slope, and was grazing slowly up it. As we came up we could see several of the animals, but could not distinguish the heads well. As we refused to fire from where we were Bishu had perforce to take us nearer, and he moved us round to a small narrow glade which looked right out on to the hill. We took up positions behind sál trees and watched the bison. We soon saw that it would be impossible to get a near shot. There was dense grass and bush on the edge of the forest, then an open space, and then more scattered bushes in which the bison were.

We could not advance a foot, and it therefore meant a shot at at least 150 yards, and probably over. I signalled to the Colonel to take the shot. He refused, as I had expected, and then explained that as he had with him only his 12-bore rifle, it was impossible for him to take the shot. I kept an eye on the bison all the time, whilst I shoved my rifle towards him, but he, being the good sportsman that he was, would have none of it.

I confess I was not keen on the shot. It was a long one for my short experience. I watched a particular brute, which, so far as I could make out, was the one Bishu pointed out, until he came slowly from behind a clump of bushes and exposed the shoulder when, taking a mighty breath, I pulled the trigger. Dead silence, followed by three groans and a rush, or succession of rushes rising to a roar, as the herd stampeded over the brow of the hill and was gone. We dashed forward. 'Down; he's down!' shouted the Colonel, and he was away to the right, whilst I kept straight on for the spot where I had fired at the bull and heard the groans. He had fallen in his tracks, shot through the heart with a ·500 black powder Express, for it was before the days of cordite sporting rifles. This is the only instance I have personally seen of a bison being killed by a single shot from a ·500 at this distance.

The Colonel returned shortly. He had made over the hill to see if he could get a shot at the retreating herd. They had, however, vanished.

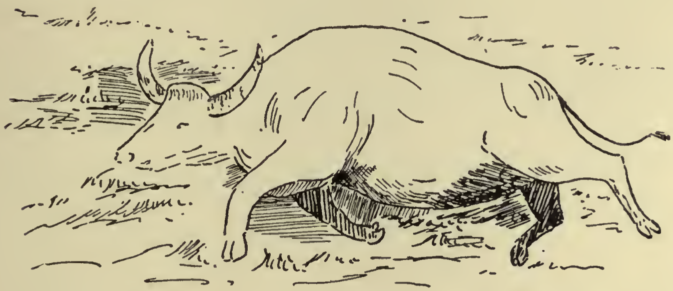
A thorough good sportsman, the Colonel was as pleased as I was over my success, and paced out the distance, which he vowed was fully 200 yards, an estimate which was practically correct, for he made it 190 paces. The head was not a particularly big one. I have shot finer since,



HE CAME SLOWLY FROM BEHIND A CLUMP OF BUSHES

but none gave me a feeling of such pride as my first bull bison.

Had I been left to myself I would have sat there and watched the obsequies performed, and then have accompanied my bull back to camp. I could not desert my comrade, however, so leaving a man to go and fetch men from the camp, we went on and had a long, fruitless day without a single track of any freshness to gladden our eyes.



CHAPTER II

Bison in Malabar—A sporting herd—Tropical forest in the monsoon —Bamboo forest—Stalking difficulties—I wound a bull—The herd charges—I turn the herd and kill a cow—Track up the wounded bull—The Central Provinces again—Come upon a bull—My tussle with the bull—A missfire—An awkward predicament—Anxious moments—Death of the bull.

A SPORTING HERD

THE following account of an adventure I had with a herd of bison some years ago down in Malabar appeared in the *Indian Field* shortly afterwards. I reproduce it here, as it throws light on the habits of this fine animal.

It was the darkest hour of the night—the hour preceding dawn—as we left the Swiss chalet-like wooden bungalow, situated picturesquely by the side of a small winding stream at the foot of the hills, and started out in search of a herd of bison reported to be in the neighbourhood. The bright silvery face of the lady of the night was hidden behind thick banks of clouds which had welled up from the sea-board the evening before, and a thick, wet river-mist enveloped everything, the trees standing up out of it like dark, wakeful sentinels keeping watch and ward over the marches of the animal world. The effluvia rising from the damp, sodden jungle would have made the most rabid amongst the disciples of the *Anopheles* creed change his views as to the sole source of the malaria fiend.

For an hour and more we plodded on in the darkness, floundering through mire or stumbling into the deep imprints left by wild elephants, bison, and animals of the many descriptions which comprised the fauna of this sportsman's paradise. 'Such,' one thought, 'must have been the state of the water-sodden globe when the animals issued from the Ark at the bidding of the greatest of mythological animal-tamers.'

The dawn broke slowly, almost unwillingly, and the light struggled fitfully through the dense mist. This latter, however, lightened perceptibly as one got farther and farther away from the stream, and as daylight dissipated the gloom we could see that we had entered a dense bamboo forest, the ground beneath our feet being more or less of a morass. Less than a mile of this, and we got into the open scrub again, and to our right the hills appeared towering up amongst the masses of slowly writhing cloud.

The effects given by the play of the morning light upon this panorama of hill and slowly rolling vapour were very beautiful.

> To me
> High mountains are a feeling, but the hum of human cities torture.

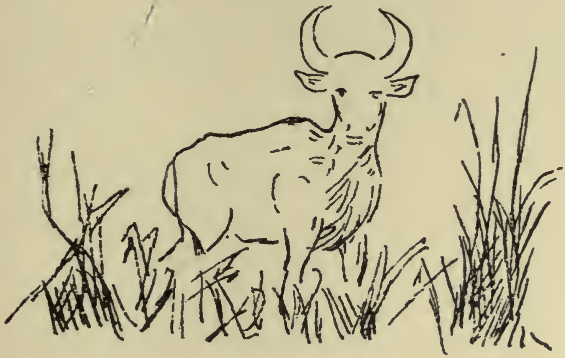
We had now picked up the tracks of the herd, not the small one of eight we had come to seek, but of a much larger one, known to comprise some thirty animals, amongst which was a good old bull, which had been seen in the locality a few days before. These tracks were quite fresh, evidently made during the night, and we held on our way in the utmost silence. Owing to the sodden state of the jungle, stalking was by no means difficult, but every now and then a twig drier than the rest would get beneath one's feet and go off like a pistol-shot, and the large thorns of the slender side branches of the giant bamboo were a never-ending source of annoyance. Did one stoop ever so low, even to assuming the derogatory position of all fours, a sharp-pointed spike would be sure to be ready to catch one exactly in the centre of the back, and it required considerable self-restraint not to give vent to audible maledictions. Or an unusually deep, swampy part of the forest would be reached, to be lightly passed over by the trackers, but in which, being in thick shooting-boots and loaded with a heavy rifle, one sunk to the knees. To get out absolutely silently was an impossibility, and the look upon the shikari's face at the slightest noise made one feel as if the lot of a condemned man upon the scaffold with the rope round his neck was by comparison quite an enviable one. Another painful experience accompanying tracking, which in its intensity becomes almost agony, is the intense desire to cough, which often assails one. This disagreeable experience must, I am sure, be common to many. One struggles against it, remembers that the wish is quite unusual, one never ordinarily feels this idiotic desire, that it is only necessary to think about something else to forget all about it—it is of no use. After breathing deeply, breathing lightly, breathing through the nose, and not breathing at all, which results in semi-suffocation, one has to give in, and then—the shikari's hopeless look of surprise and pain.

All the above experiences were gone through as we cautiously followed on the trail of the slowly moving herd. Fresher and fresher had become the indications that they were not far off, and for some fifteen minutes we had been moving forward, the conditions being unusually favourable, without a sound to break the harmony of the proceedings. Suddenly the silence is broken. A short, sharp, snappy, bark-like roar cleaves the air, a short rush in the forest on our left flank, and we know that we are up to the herd and that it has winded us.

See us they could not, nor we them, as we had entered a giant bamboo forest interspersed with tall trees and a thick growth of high grass. Intense silence succeeded for a few seconds, broken only by the twittering of a few small birds in a neighbouring tree. Then followed the well-known and intensely thrilling rush of heavy animals in heavy jungle as the herd closed up, apparently uncertain as to which point to look for the danger. As animal after animal took fright the sounds increased to a crashing roar, and the leader at last making up its mind the roar bore down in our direction with a deafening sound, as of some great mountain-stream in turbulent flood. No time had we for thought. Action was imperative. A hurried whisper from Anacondu (the head shikari), which was scarcely necessary, even if I could have understood the gibberish which took the place with him of a Christian language (his English was limited to ' elephan,' ' bisn,' ' samur,' mine, of the wild sounds he produced, nil), and we closed up to a big bamboo clump which happened to be handy. I waited, muscles braced to their utmost tension, finger on trigger, and nerves and heart playing hide-and-seek throughout my anatomy. It was a wildly exciting moment, and would have long marked the day with a white corner-stone had not one even more enlivening occurred later on. It was short-lived, however, as the herd, suddenly swerving to their left front as one, went crashing away through the forest like a tornado. The foremost bison were within 15 to 20 yards as they turned, but not one did we see, owing to the thick cover. Relief was written over the faces of my companions, and I am sure it must have been very legibly imprinted upon mine. So sudden had been the rush that the whole thing could only have lasted a minute, and yet one had lived a life in that short space of time. Whilst the herd were trampling a broad line through the forest, the roar gradually decreasing to a faint, far-off murmur—like a Calcutta nor'-easter blowing itself out—we held a hurried consultation, the trackers in words, I in forcible pantomime. Anacondu lit a match (he had matches of his own on him, but I noticed he used mine which I had given him to carry along with my tobacco-pouch—a small point, but one so characteristic of the native), and the slight air moving showed how the herd had winded us. They had doubled in their tracks slightly to their left, and were on our left flank as we came up.

We now took up the trail again, and for a short time silence was not so absolutely essential.

We had scarcely moved forward when a fine sambhar stag broke from a bamboo clump on our right. He was within a few yards, and I just got a snapshot view of him as he bounded away. He need not have troubled, as we were in search of lordlier game than he. The direction in which the bison had proceeded soon took us out of the heavy bamboo jungle in which we had put them up so unwittingly; and but for the swampiness of the forest hereabouts, the going would have been comparatively easy. My excitement grew as we got out into the more open jungle, as one now had some hopes of being able to see one's game—hide-and-seek with a herd of bison in thick forest being a form of pastime a trifle trying even to the best of nerves. Cold and wet and dirt (between heavy mist, tropical showers, and miry bogs I was by now in a sorry plight as regards appearance; but who thinks of that when the game is afoot and when that game is bison ?) and the worries of bugs and thorns, not to omit friend *Anopheles*, all passed unnoticed now as we stole onwards, searching carefully every portion of the forest. It must have been well over an hour later when we again came up with the herd. There was a slight fall in the ground, the forest being of fairly open character. A little distance ahead was one of those partial openings or natural clearings, consisting of heavy boggy soil covered with a crop of coarse 3-foot high grass and scattered clumps of bushes, which were common to the forests of this part of India. The bison were grazing near the far end of this clearing, the forest beyond having much the same character as that we were in. It could be seen that the herd was very considerably scattered, and the wary animals were evidently not aware of our presence ; but caution was nevertheless imperative, as should the bison wind or see us again they would certainly not give me another chance. Moving forward with the utmost care I strove to make out the big bull I had been told was present in the herd, but search failed to show him to me. Some outlying cows away to the right were evidently beginning to get suspicious and uneasy ; and one suddenly turned and fronted us, standing stock still with ears thrown forward to catch the slightest sound, head well up and nostrils agape to cull the slightest taint in the breeze. It was evident that she had not seen us ; but that instinct of self-preservation, so strong in the jungle



A cow turned suddenly and fronted us.

denizen and developed to a marvellous degree in the great hulking brutes before me, evidently told her that there was something unusual about, and told me that I had no time to lose if I wished to secure a reward for a heavy morning's work. Glancing again over the heads I could see from my position, I singled out what appeared to be a fair-sized bull and let fly. The bullet struck him true, and he turned and made off in a line dead away from us, entering the forest behind the clearing almost at once. Instant confusion and turmoil arose, and we dashed forward, half-right, as a glance showed that the herd was closing up in that direction, and as quick as the awful state of the ground would permit, in the hope of making out and getting a shot at the big bull. The herd had all collected in the open clearing, and as we reached the edge of the forest and dashed, or rather stumbled, into the marshy boggy opening, we pulled up short in sheer amazement and wonder at the most remarkable sight it has ever fallen to my lot to witness. A hurried glance at Anacondu's face informed me that he was equally surprised, if not equally interested and enthusiastic. For there, less than 50 yards away, was the herd—a herd of some thirty bison—closed up together in battle array, a serried, seething mass of wildly tossing, brightly gleaming, yellow horns and waving, uplifted tails. I have said that the herd appeared to be closing up on the right as we started to rush forward, but I had imagined it was only due to their all taking the same direction in flight. Of course, to make progress at all in such abominable going, one's eyes had to be fixed upon one's feet, and therefore the movements of the herd could not be seen during our short forward rush. The point we had aimed for and reached would, we had thought, take them in a diagonal line away from us and across our front. After closing up they had, however, turned; and the direction they appeared to be taking, for they were moving forward in short, sharp steps, evidently a very enraged herd, would bring them diagonally just past our right front. Did they swerve but slightly in their charge, for there could be little doubt about their amiable intentions, they would be over us. We were both in the open, and there was no clump of bushes of any size near us that the herd could not go right through. I shall probably never see such a sight again, nor will it be ever effaced from my memory. The bison at all times in his native jungles is a magnificent beast. With black, glossy, gleaming back and flanks, clean snow-white stockings, and massive head, what a picture he makes when, turned to bay and really angry, he stands quivering with rage and fury before his wild onslaught on to his foe. Such I had seen before, and for such I was prepared. But to see the picture multiplied by thirty! It was stupendous!

I had never been present at, but had often read and also heard of authentic cases of, a herd closing up *en masse* to get rid of the too pressing attentions of a tiger; but I was unaware of the existence of a herd sporting enough to close up to charge a man. The position and sight, although of the nature to set the blood dancing through one's veins at the double, was too serious and urgent for more than the most hasty study and reflection on points of natural history, especially as there appeared every likelihood of the notes never being recorded for the benefit of sportsmen. The herd did not care about natural history; but it evidently did care, and care very much, about its breakfast, and intended to dispute the possession of that, to it, luscious, steamy bog-clearing. The distance between us had already perceptibly diminished, for they had not stopped their forward movement; but with loud snortings had edged closer and closer in their endeavour to see exactly what the danger was before the leader sounded the charge. Matters had now, therefore, become more exciting than pleasant. Our only chance was to turn them, but even at this juncture I made one more last effort to pick out the big bull (and Anacondu, I learnt afterwards, had tried to do the same); but in that sea of tossing horns it was impossible, and so, as there was little time to waste, I picked out what I hoped would be a bull and let drive at it. There was a waver, I thought—I hoped—and as I fired my last barrel the herd broke from a smart trot to a lumbering gallop, swerved to their left, and went off through the forest with that well-known crashing roar of sound. Music sweeter than their retreating footsteps I have rarely heard, and though music was not in the thoughts of my companions, for the two other trackers emerged from somewhere behind, solid content was expressed on their countenances.

The herd had crashed off, but not all. Two angry bellows proclaimed the fact that they had left one of their number behind, and we at once proceeded to move cautiously forward in the direction from which the sounds emanated. A few yards from where the herd had advanced in battle array the forest commenced again, and just within this we saw a bison down, struggling in its death agony. Stealing forward, finger on trigger, I crept to within fifteen paces. The beast, with a short bellow, tried to rise, but it was too far spent ; a couple of groans and a deep sigh, and its sporting spirit had departed to the happy hunting-lands. After making sure the bison was dead, we went up to it, and to my intense chagrin I found that it was an old cow. At the time of firing, in my attempt to turn the herd, I of course knew that the chances were rather in favour of my hitting a cow, but with the brutes showing such a determined front and aggressiveness, the risk had to be taken, if I ever wished to fire another shot—the rules of sport and the forest notwithstanding. The fates willed that I should have bad luck. I turned away with a feeling of annoyance, and commenced to look for the blood of the bull I had first wounded. My disgust was increased by the demeanour of the men who, to my surprise, answered my inquiries as to where the bull had stood when I fired by stating and showing that they did not think I had hit it. Hit or not, every inch of the ground was going to be carefully searched ; to that I at once made up my mind. Some distance from the cow we came upon some blood. This they at once put down as being the cow's. I was too certain, however, about my shot to give in, and I took a wide cast in the direction I believed the bull had gone. After some search, only half-heartedly joined in by the men, I found blood on some tall grass. I pointed it out triumphantly to Anacondu. The mixed look of pity and amusement on his face as he stooped to pick some of the blades was good to see, and so was the rapid transfiguration which resulted on his finding blood, fresh blood, upon his fingers. All listlessness vanished now. With a wounded bull about it was no time to skulk, and they all set to work with a will. Cautiously and carefully we followed the tracks, and soon we came upon a mass of clotted, frothy blood which was sufficient proof that the animal had met its death-blow, and that it was only a matter of time as to where it dropped. For the next two hours we followed the trail, the blood never ceasing, and over and over again did the rifle come up to the shoulder at the snap of a bamboo or twig. It is nerve-stretching work walking up a wounded bison in thick jungle, and the wounded bull took us through some of the nastiest places we had seen that morning, progression being often only possible on hands and knees. And those bamboos' thorns! Every bamboo clump, each patch of tall grass, big tree, or thick bush might shelter the wounded and doubtless enraged brute, and the spirit which animated this most sporting of herds led me to anticipate a vicious charge should we be spotted as we approached, and he be still capable of making it. After some two and a half hours we reached a small hill on which the forest was of a more open nature. The blood trail took us over this, and disappeared into what proved to be a large stretch of bamboo jungle on the far side. After satisfying myself that this was so, and sending a couple of men to see that the bull was not in the immediate vicinity, I had reluctantly to relinquish further search. My time was up, my resting-place for that night was the bungalow of a friend many miles distant, and on the morrow I had to start for the far north. It was a sad blow, as I wanted to look upon that bull. There was little doubt that its trophy, which from the size of the tracks there was every reason to even then think would be a good one, would take its place amongst many another hardly-earned one; but I wished to see it in its native wilds. However, there was no help for it. An eight-mile tramp through swampy, boggy forests, followed by another eight miles on the pad of an elephant, lay between me and my night's halting-place, and there was no time to lose if I wanted to get there before dark. Leaving two men to continue the search—for Anacondu was certain the bull would drop that day, with the hopes of liberal *baksheesh* as a reward for success—I started on one of the worst eight miles it has ever been my lot to have to accomplish. The excitement of the tracking being now absent, there was nothing to keep one's attention off the vileness of the ground we covered, and to add to the discomfort the rain of one of the wettest months of the year commenced falling with that steady persistence which means that it has set in for good. But what are such minor trifles and disagreeables in comparison to such a day as I had had? Shall I ever see such a sight as that closed-up herd again—those wildly tossing, gleaming yellow horns and stiffened, erect, waving tails. Shall I ever watch it determinedly making up its mind to charge, and, with blood wildly coursing through my veins, shall I realize that that charge is meant for me? Yes, I shall see it—nay, I have seen it—but it was in shadowland, in that land in which, locked in the arms of Morpheus, one rehopes one's hopes and refights one's battles o'er again.

MY TUSSLE WITH THE BULL BISON

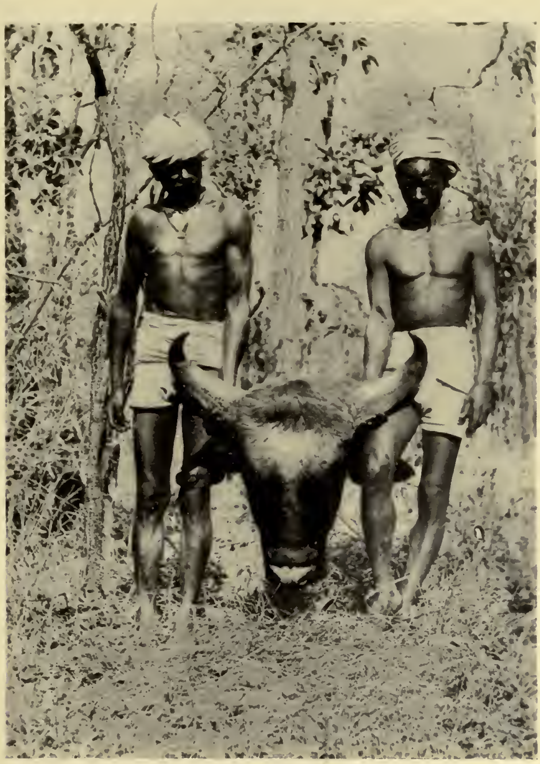
It was in April, 19—, at B——, in the Central Provinces, that I had as near a thing with a bull bison as most men would care for. I was shifting camp that day, and in the grey dawn, saying good-bye to W—— as he lay on his cot in the verandah (he had had some hard days, and was having a morning in), I set off *en route* to B——. I had decided overnight with my shikari to make a detour on the way, as B—— was situated outside the forest, and therefore had no shooting possibilities (save, I believe, bear), and the road thereto could by a little detour be made to take one through some fine country, and I wanted a good sambhar or chitul stag.

K——, the bungalow I was leaving, was situated in the midst of a very fine sál forest, interspersed with considerable areas of a park-like grass country which serpentined about amongst the blocks of forest. It would perhaps be difficult to find a finer or more sporting country than the B—— Valley. It was alive with game! Great herds of barasingha and chitul roamed over the grass of the park-like areas, or rested in the deep shade of the beautiful sál forest—at this season a dream of vivid colour, clothed in its young, delicate, green, hot-weather foliage. Sambhar, too, were plentiful in this favoured area, and tiger and bison were far from being uncommon.

We looked into or marched through several of these park-like pieces of grass country without seeing anything worthy of a second glance. Barasingha there were, but as the maximum number of head allowed to be shot this year had already been attained, they were 'closed,' the consequence being that one was always meeting really good heads. A few chitul with small stags were also seen. Leaving the grass areas, our route took us into a piece of sál forest of some extent, the lower levels being a thick forest of pure sál, whilst mixed bamboo and scrub occupied the higher parts. We had been marching through this some time when the shikari, Kanig by name, suddenly stopped, and a stag sambhar got up and trotted off. The head was a fair one, and, changing the small bore for the ·500 Express, I went after him. He did not appear to have been much startled, but we never saw him again. A long track was out of the question, as the forest was a huge one, and I had determined to march straight into B—— so as to arrive there before the heat became oppressive. *L'homme propose!*

Giving up the stag we continued down through the forest, putting up some doe sambhar on our way, until we saw the trees thinning in front, and another of the little grass areas, or maidans, appeared before us. It looked quite a small one from our position, the forest on either side being only some 150 yards apart, whilst its length was some 250 yards. As a matter of fact, it opened out into a much larger area of park-like country, but that I only discovered subsequently. The events to be related here took place in the arena of the small maidan.

We cautiously approached the edge of the forest to see a few chitul does disappearing. Save for these the little area at first appeared empty. But what was that dark object some 80 yards away? 'Bhalu (bear),' said Kanig. 'Bhalu, Sahib.' I looked. The maidan was covered with the usual coarse tussocky grass, about 3 feet high, peculiar to this part of India. The high stuff was interspersed with spaces where the grass was quite short—the areas having been probably cut over by villagers or the local jungle tribes. As the black object was in one of the 3-foot patches of grass, I had strong doubts about it being a bear. Ramming a couple of cartridges into my ·500, we crept forward, and soon saw that the black object was a bison. This had been my first thought, as it was not the first time I have stood up against one of these shy, timid, but amongst the wiliest and cutest animals of the jungle. We moved silently forward, the shikari, after the nature of his tribe, whispering exhortations and instructions to shoot straight, to take care to kill, etc. It is rare to get even an old stager to keep cool when he has brought one up to the more dangerous animals, unless he be a man you have had for years and have been able to properly drill. In this instance I had never set eyes on my present man till five days previously. The tussocky grass admirably favoured a stealthy stalk and near approach, and the bison was apparently fully occupied in grazing on the wet dank grass which grew along a narrow mud-channel or drain, for it was little more than a drain, which wound in a serpentine manner across the maidan. The drain was edged, but not hidden, by the tussocky grass. I was subsequently to make a very close acquaintance with this drain, and to offer up a fervent thanksgiving for its presence and the valuable help it afforded me. We crept up to within about 30 yards, and were then satisfied that the animal was a bull, as indeed its solitariness led us to expect—that and its gleaming black colour and great size. However, as one occasionally finds old barren cows leading a solitary life after the manner of the old bulls, it was necessary to make sure before firing. A few steps forward by the bison, who was grazing towards us, took it into a little depression, and I could only see the great black hump looming above the grass as the ground rose slightly in front of us. This necessitated my creeping still



HEAD OF BISON (GAUR) AND THE TRACKERS

ON THE EDGE OF THE BISON COUNTRY

closer. I must state here that Kanig had my small ·303 and his own axe, a weapon carried by all these local jungle tribes and from which they never part, and I noticed as I left him that he had laid the rifle on the ground, as also the axe, and was crouching down with eyes fixed on the bison. His lips moved, but I did not catch what he said. Nor was it material. I crept silently up the little drain, here widened out slightly, till I found myself within eighteen paces of the bison; and as he loomed suddenly upon me, with only the tussocky grass between us, his enormous bulk took my breath away. I had seen them before in the forest, but never at such close quarters as this. However, there was no time for thought now. Raising the rifle I took careful aim; it would have been impossible to miss the immense mass—it looked like an elephant—and pulled the trigger. Click! A missfire! And brand-new modified cordite cartridges (my ·500 is a Holland and Holland black-powder rifle), purchased by myself the week before at the Army and Navy in Calcutta! Throwing open the breech and keeping one eye on the bison, I rapidly extracted the useless cartridge, crammed another in, closed the breech, and hurriedly sighted again on my great target. The ·500 has an easy, a too easy, pull on the right trigger, and for all my coolness the missfire must have shaken me a little, for the first shot went too high. I felt it, and rapidly fired a second, and then

I dropped, for it suddenly flashed across me, as the bull went slowly forward seemingly unharmed and not twenty paces away, that I had but one cartridge left! I admit the carelessness, but the whole thing had come upon one so suddenly. Jitman, the orderly, with the cartridge-bag and the tiffin man, was behind somewhere in the forest when we started to creep up to the bison, and I had thought in the early morning that four cartridges were enough to carry on one's own person on a hot morning's march when every little bit of extra weight is apt to tell. I sank down on the edge of the drain, extracted silently the two empty cartridge-cases, and shoved in my last one and softly closed the breech. It was a case of over-confidence!

The bull was slightly to my left when I fired. As I sank down at the edge of the little drain he moved slowly forward, and I realized to my dismay that a few paces would bring him broadside on to me within eighteen paces, and as luck would have it, the patch of high tussocky grass which I had fired over ended a little to the left; in front of me only the short, coarse, cut stuff covered the ground, affording practically no concealment. I got down as low as I could possibly manage, consonant with maintaining a position from which I could fire if the bull charged, and muttered a prayer that he would walk past without turning his head my way. He reached a point exactly in front of me, and then halted and looked about.

If it is ever possible for one's spirit to look out of one's eyes, mine assuredly did so then. The bull had but to turn full-face in my direction, and he could not fail to spot me, as there was nothing to conceal me in front. My only protection consisted in having at my back a wall of the high tussocky grass which resembled in colouring my khaki kit. But those 18 yards in front! I remember thinking all this in a flash, wondering whether I should have any chance of stopping him with my last cartridge, wondering whether it would missfire and whether the vault to the left I had determined on should the bull charge would be frustrated by the tussocky masses. That bull must have stood there five minutes, and the strain of those minutes was one that I am unlikely to forget. For some reason he had got it into his head that the shots had come from the direction of Kanig, or rather where he had been when I left him, for he subsequently told me that he had wormed his way to a large ant-hill, where he was to all intents and purposes safe. It was in that direction that the bull kept his gaze mostly directed—half right. It only wanted another half right for his glance to fall on me, and once or twice it came perilously near to doing so, and I saw the eye ablaze with a wild though curiously self-contained fury, or so it seemed to me. I shall remember that eye for a long time. So close was I that I could see the blood trickling down over the hair on the shoulder, and noted that the shot had missed the heart. The other bullet had struck him, but far too high up at the top of the shoulder.

Neither seemed to have affected the bull. One felt as if one had been firing with a pea-shooter at him, and I simply dared not risk that last shot, though I had a beautiful bull's-eye to aim at. To have another missfire would mean a charge if the bison heard the click. And, any way, it would have left me unloaded, and so was not to be thought of. There was no doubt that the bull was puzzled as his eye continually roved about in search, and how he failed to spot me is a thing I shall never satisfactorily decide. The one and only factor in my favour was the fact that, cordite being smokeless, there was no cloud of smoke hanging about such as always followed a shot with the old black powder cartridge. I have little doubt that this saved me, as this bull would undoubtedly have charged the smoke had there been any such to betray the direction of the foe. All sorts of thoughts flitted through my mind as I crouched there, though, curiously enough, fear was almost absent. I knew that I was keeping my head and keeping quite cool, and that my brain was actively at work looking out for any opportunity for ameliorating my position which might arise. I was beginning to get desperate when the bison moved slowly forward for about twenty paces, and then turning walked slowly away end on. The whole thing was done in the slowest and most deliberate and methodical manner, as if he had told us in so many words that he intended stopping and seeing this matter through. He went about 40 yards, and my relief was so great that I had already begun to think of offensive tactics with my one cartridge. 'One shot,' I meditated; 'if I could but get at the shoulder, and then a rapid bolt to the rear.' Before, however, I had time to come to any determination on the point, I was fairly staggered once again. For the bull turned, facing the direction from which we had originally left the forest, and deliberately *sat down*. From a mind eased of the tremendous strain put upon it and thoughts of offensive operations, I was thrown back into a state of desperation once again. The habits of the bison when wounded and enraged are so well known as to be unknown, to speak in a paradox, for one can never tell how they will act. Of this I was aware, and here was one who apparently combined all their vindictiveness when roused with a deliberate calmness which was infinitely disconcerting. As soon as he was comfortably settled he kept his head slowly and constantly on the move, carefully searching the grass from side to side, but always on our side of the maidan. He had chosen a piece of level ground as high as any in the maidan, and clothed with the short grass only. I could see the greater part of his body and all his head from where I was, about 50–60 yards away (I think 50, as I paced it afterwards), and I confess I became distinctly alarmed at this move on the bull's part, and as uncomfortable in my mind as I had been previously.

How was this matter going to end if he intended to sit on the *qui vive* through the long hot hours of the day; and such a thing had been done by bison before. What I could not understand then, and cannot still, even with the light of subsequent events to guide me, is why that bull chose that position and *sat down*. It commanded the whole arena, I admit, and he may have been harder hit than I thought; but if so, he didn't show it in his movements. In fact, had I not seen the wounds I should have begun to think I had missed him. The actions of that bull still remain to me most mysterious, and can only be explained by the fact that he could not make up his mind where or who to go for. I was thus rapidly pondering the situation, when suddenly I was startled by a rush on my right as if some small animal was bolting through the grass. I could of course see nothing from my lowly position, nor I believe did the bison, though his head came round like a rocket. The rush was in the long grass, and I at once guessed the reason. The shikari Kanig was bolting for the forest and safety, and though I was incensed I could not be angry, because of course he was not aware of my predicament, and my conduct to him must have appeared absolutely inexplicable. His rush for safety made matters ten times worse for me though, as it gave the whole position away, or very nearly so. I had cause to bless the fact that I had left him several yards away on my right. The bull now concentrated the whole of his attention to this part of the grass, and I leant back as far as possible, with one leg tucked under me in such a position that in a very short time I suffered excruciating agony from it, and—watched the bull. There was nothing else left for me to do. I shall probably remember those minutes as long as I live! When the bison had been 18 yards away I realized that if he saw me matters would reach a climax at once. Now, with him 50 yards away, I felt that the cards were still all in his favour and the strain all on mine. Suddenly, away to the right, on the edge of the forest, I heard the sharp snap of a dead bamboo. Round went the bull's head, and his gaze was riveted on the spot. Could this be a diversion, I thought, on the part of the other men! But it was not repeated. They were too frightened themselves. It had helped, however, as the bull had now two places to watch. My eye at this moment caught the glisten of a metal cartridge-case a yard or more away in front. I looked; it was the missfire. I thought I might as well have it in my left barrel in case of emergencies, as there was the off-chance that it might be the striker of the rifle, and not the cartridge, that was at fault. The difficulty was to get it without attracting the bull's attention, but this was successfully accomplished. As the minutes crawled on the strain grew greater, and I determined at last that I could not wait there any longer. The way at the back of me was, I knew, blocked. It consisted entirely of the long tussocky grass; and though a dive into it would at once hide me, the noise I should make would immediately bring the bison down upon me—the noise and the waving grass-heads. No, there was no safety there. My only chance, I could see, was to slither down into the drain, dash along this as quickly as possible, and then be guided by circumstances, and anything in the shape of a shelter that I might be lucky to come across. Of course, I didn't like it. No one would! But anything was better than the strain, and my stopping where I was appeared to be becoming more and more dangerous the longer I prolonged it. This plan I put into operation. Waiting till the bull faced the forest where the bamboo had snapped, I slipped slowly down on my back the couple of feet into the drain, keeping my eye on the bull the while, which was only too easy, as there was no bank on the opposite side, only a shelving slope. As soon as in the drain, I turned over slowly, and, half rising, I took my eye from the bull and ran to the left, down that winding drain for some 20 yards or so with my heart in my mouth and the cold sweat pouring down me. I seemed to feel, rather than see, the bull spring to his feet; and, leaving the drain, I swept to the left, stumbling through the long grass and making for a friendly ant-hill I saw about 30 yards away. One glance from its friendly shelter showed the bull advancing, and having seen, as I swung round the mound, my cartridge man on the edge of the forest some 50 yards away, I aimed and fired that last cartridge at the bull with no further hesitation. The shot went home and turned him. To about face, rush to my man and get cartridges was the work of a few seconds, and again approaching the bison, I, after a bad and palpable miss (for I was a bit jumpy, I fancy), got two more bullets home; at least, I felt certain they were hits. And yet that bull stood up and still advanced towards us. But his movements got slower and slower, and after a few paces he sat down but a little to the right of where he had formerly stood so close to me earlier in the proceedings. Save for his slower movement and the fact that he had again sat down, he did not, however, appear to be much the worse. I could not understand it. 'But,' I thought, 'it is easily finished now.' Misfortune and cartridges were, however, to be my portion to-day. I now found that Jitman had only brought out one packet of ·500, ten only! Of these but three remained, and with the possibilities of missfires before me, I could not even count on having three.

My reflections on cartridge dealers and missfires would not bear repeating. I could not, however, wish for them a worse fate than the experience I had been through. A close watch on the bull made it obvious that he was hard hit, but though he did not get up he maintained his close watch on us. 'The small-bore,' I thought, and whispered to Jitman to go and get it from Kanig who was behind a neighbouring tree. To my rage and disgust he came back without the rifle. In his flight Kanig had carried nothing, apparently. The rifle, his axe, and cloth were all lying in the drain, and must be now within two or three yards of where the bull was sitting. It was annoying. There was nothing for it but to husband the cartridges left me, and wait on the future. Having got out of two tight places, I felt fairly confident now (for the first time) of bagging the bison. We watched him for some ten minutes or so, and once his head dropped and he lay over sideways. 'Why, he's dead or dying!' I said. But I had hardly spoken before up came his head round in our direction, and he got on his feet and again that slow walk towards us. But surely now there was a difference! He seemed to sway a little, and then to almost totter as he again turned slowly to face the forest and again sat down. It was then that I began to suspect that one of the later shots had broken a leg, and this subsequently proved to be the case. It accounted for his not charging home when I retreated down the drain, and stopped him with the last cartridge. We did not know this then, however, and we had not done with the bull. As we watched he seemed to droop, and we felt certain that he was ours; but three times he got up and walked a few steps towards us before sitting down again, and always that unwearying, steady gaze. Never was man more angry. With the small-bore I could have settled the matter in a few seconds. With the bull doing sentry-go over that much-wanted rifle, and but three cartridges left for the other, I hardly knew what to do. Meanwhile the minutes dragged on, and still we were not quite sure as to whether we were the watched or the watchers, the hunted or the hunters! I could stand it no longer. The bull at his last move had sat down nearer us, but behind a tussocky mass of grass with an ant-hill rising out of it, so that only his hump and head were visible. I determined to make for a solitary tree to my right front, from which I could get a shot at about 40 yards, and see if I could not settle the matter. I told the men to stay where they were, and started off. As I cautiously made my way through the grass tussocks with my eye on the bull, I slipped, and in the stumble forward took my eye off the bison to look at my feet. I halted, holding my breath. No sound from the bull, and I looked round. Yes, there he was, or rather the great black hump. Another 30–40 yards and suddenly I saw the bison to my left, and much nearer than I had thought he was. I dropped down, and took a survey of the position. The black hump I had been watching so carefully was an outcrop of black rock, having much the shape of the hump of the bull. I remembered now having noticed it whilst I lay trying to flatten myself in the grass at an earlier trying period of that morning. The bull had not seen me, and I crawled snakewise to the tree and got behind it. Yes, the bison was certainly very sick ; but his unwearying gaze was still fixed on our side of the maidan, and his ears were still thrown forward. He still looked as if he had a charge in him. I glanced back to see how far the forest was, and what line of retreat I should take, and then turned and slowly raised the rifle. I brought it down again with a muttered exclamation. The bull had suddenly rolled over on his side, or so I imagined, for as I was sighting on him, his head fell sideways and the body disappeared. I was too surprised for words. At one instant apparently full of life and wickedness, and next instant dead or, any way, disappeared, and that meant down. I could see nothing of him from where I was, and circumspection was still necessary with this bull, for whom I had the greatest respect and the best of reasons for mistrusting. Signalling to the men that he was down, I commenced a wide circuit, so as to approach the bison from the opposite side of the maidan. It was not till we had got to a point almost opposite to the spot I had last fired from that anything was visible, and then I suddenly saw the bison. He was lying on his side with his head stretched out, and appeared quite dead. It was necessary to make perfectly sure before approaching too close, and as I was unwilling to use one of the last remaining cartridges of the heavy rifle, I asked the men whether one of them would now go and creep quietly up at the back and get the other rifle whilst I covered the bull in front. Kanig flatly refused to go. His remembrance of his altogether too close proximity already once that morning was enough for him. Jitman volunteered to go, and he was soon back with the rifle. I put a bullet into the body with no visible result, and we then slowly advanced, the men throwing lumps of earth and stones at the body—a proceeding made necessary by the nasty habit these animals have of shamming death and then jumping up and charging with their last breath. When a few rocks and lumps of earth had rebounded off the immense side, I went up and stood over the bull and reflected. I had seen him too close, and in such a manner as to stamp him indelibly on my brain, to make a further inspection of him necessary for me. He was a fine bull, the head not as big as I had hoped. But what a gallant spirit! Unvanquished to the end. 'And of the two of us,' I thought to myself, 'I think you have come out of it in the best light.' I had seen bulls act in various ways before when attacked, but never after the fashion of this one. And had I known the spirit that was in him I should have approached him in a very different fashion, I fancy; and certainly with a pocket full of cartridges. I learnt a lesson that morning which is unlikely to be soon forgotten.

So ended the grandest fight and the most exciting hour I have passed in India. For the fight had lasted an hour, and stubborn to the last the bull's gallant spirit winged its way to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

CHAPTER III

Shooting tips—Cocking both hammers of heavy rifles—Experience with a bison and a 10-bore Paradox—The bison and the 8-bore—Experiences in bison tracking—Old cartridges—Charmed life of a black buck.

SHOOTING TIPS

BY the way, it is always well to remember that when you are using a heavy rifle, like an 8-bore firing a heavy charge (say ten drams), you should only cock one hammer at a time, as the terrific jar often sends off the second barrel if you have both cocked at once.

I was out after bison one day with a 10-bore Paradox (Holland and Holland), and had loaded my cartridges myself with six drams apiece. In the early morning we came upon an old bull, and without thought I naturally cocked both hammers and fired the right barrel, being quite unaware of the playful possibilities of the rifle when in this condition. The second barrel jarred off, and I was thrown backwards by the recoil, being in a kneeling position at the time. As it happened, I subsequently found that both bullets had struck him, the second high up. I did not know that then, however, being so wholly taken by surprise at being shot head over heels backwards so suddenly. As I gathered myself up I saw the bison coming in my direction. Luckily there was a small nullah with an eight-foot drop between us, and I did not wait just then to ruminate over that second barrel, though I remember feeling certain that I had not touched the second trigger. The bison was very hard hit, and did not go 100 yards before dropping to a third bullet.

That was some time ago. Quite recently, however, another instance of the kind came to my notice. I had spent three days with a man in a glorious shooting-country, the same country in which I had the tussle with the bull I have described already. A day or two after we parted I had a note from him, saying that he had bagged a bison, his great ambition.

‘ But,’ he wrote, ‘ I had forgotten the tip about cocking both barrels of the 8-bore at the same time.’

As can be understood, during the day or two we had spent together in the pretty forest rest-house, we had talked ' bison ' each night over dinner and the post-prandial smoke, as it was one of the objects of his trip to bag one. I had related several experiences of my own and friends on stalking these animals on foot. How that it often meant a terrible long day's work in the cruel hot sun of the hot weather, starting too at crow's dawn, and that more often than not one only came up with one's quarry late in the afternoon, probably nearly hidden in a bamboo brake. That one often lost one's bison by striving to circle about to get a shoulder-shot, which in my and other men's experience so often ended in the bison spotting one and bolting, giving either a very difficult shot or none at all. It had also to be borne in mind that after many hours' tramp in the hot-weather Indian sun, even the hardest and fittest of us would be in a droopy condition. Yarns on end could be told of men who, when brought up to their bison late in the afternoon, were so done that they could scarce lift the rifle steadily on their quarry, and often through sheer lassitude got an attack of ' jerks ' and missed.

This, and the fact that once the sun has got up to any height, one so often finds one's bison in the midst of some dense bamboo brake filling the bottom of a little valley, or the riverain-terraces of a nullah through which a stream tinkles and purls in miniature waterfalls, makes it extremely desirable that one should be armed with a heavy rifle. The option is often given you of firing (and this after a long hard stalk, mind) at a small black patch—a part of the animal, but what part it is often almost impossible to decide, or of not firing at all. Now it is cruel to take this chance of wounding the animal with a light rifle; for there is no certainty of bagging him under those conditions, and a lightly or even badly wounded bison will go miles. If, however, you are provided with an 8-bore, or a ·400–·450, or ·500 cordite rifle, you may take a sight on the part you see in the almost perfect assurance that you will bag the beast, as the shock to the system from these rifles, provided you hit him in the body, is so great that he rarely gets very far. It is true that you have to look out for a charge, for if not hit in a vital spot the brute will still have plenty in him to make things lively enough for you.

My friend, whilst climbing up after his bison into the hills, for the animal had left the maidan grass areas at dawn, had remembered our conversations, and they flashed through his mind as he topped the bank and spotted his quarry. Without further ado he blazed into him with the right barrel of the 8-bore.

'I was knocked head over heels' (he is a fairly big, heavy man) 'down the bank, both barrels (twenty drams) having gone off together. The

HE SHOOK HIS HEAD AT ME AND ROLLED OVER DEAD

HEAD OF NILGAI OR BLUE BULL

poor beast could not do much with four ounces of lead inside him. When I had picked myself up and crawled back over the bank, he turned round when he saw me, shook his head at me, and rolled over dead. My shoulder got a most awful jar. I shall now remember the tip about cocking the second trigger.'

It was a good example this, by the way, of the different ways of killing really heavy game. Shortly before I had had an hour's excitement with my bull, an older, heavier, and tougher customer it is true, before I killed him, and might well have lost him or been bagged myself. I had only a ·500 Holland and Holland modified cordite with me, and a light ·303 sporting Lee-Metford! He who arms himself with a really powerful weapon when in pursuit of these big animals will save himself great weariness and travail of the flesh and spirit.

Remember, one's armoury must be all thought out and provided for *before* the start. It is when one has reached one's shooting-grounds and discovers that one has fallen into a real soft thing in the way of shikar country that one at once feels, and feels most sorely, any weak spots in one's battery, for it is too late to remedy any defect then. And what golden chances may be missed!

I remember much bitterness of spirit on one occasion, and that over quite small game. This arose from the unwitting use of old bad cartridges.

I had never seen black buck, not having been stationed in black-buck country. Whatever the animal may be, I suppose the sportsman is always keen when first introduced to it. I remember being out once with a man who had never seen or shot a kakar. I have known them intimately for years and, save for the pot, would never dream of raising a rifle to them. This man spent several trying days after them! And he was in a tiger, bison, and barasingha country!

I was in the same position with black buck on the occasion I am alluding to, and, modestly, I only wanted two good heads.

On no less than four occasions I found myself, after an arduous stalk, in front of a good buck, within easy range. A clean miss, followed by a second, was the result. It was not till the last occasion that I fully realized what was the matter. I had *four* shots at the buck. It was in the gloaming. The first hit the ground within 30 yards of myself; the buck was about 40 yards away. The next three went off with a shrill whirr like a rocket, curving after the fashion of a shell over the buck. It was ludicrous. I, the firer, could hear the scream of the bullet!

I wonder if the Afridis have yet discovered that cordite does not keep for ever. One feels peculiarly helpless when one has realized that one's cartridges are useless. I traced out the history of mine. They must have been just nine (perhaps ten) years old—two old packets which had got amongst my fresh ones.

CHAPTER IV

Black buck—Marvellous leaping powers—Appearance and size of horns—Horned females—A gay Lothario—Habits—Methods of shooting buck—Stalking—A nasty stalk and a miss—Dislike of elephants—Tracks of buck—Blue bull or nilgai—Peculiar gait—Horns—Habits—Easy to shoot—Importance of conciliating villagers near your shooting-grounds—A morning's stalk—Appearance of nilgai tracks—Death of the bull.

BLACK BUCK

THOSE who have watched these little antelopes in their homes on the great plains of India will readily award the palm for lightness, beauty, and grace to the black buck amongst all the popularly so-called deer tribe; though, of course, the black buck is an antelope and not a deer, as its horns are hollow and not solid and they are not shed annually.

Beautifully and wonderfully gracefully made are these airy little creatures ; and it is, I think, almost one of the greatest privileges accorded to the jungle lover to watch for the first time these little antelope, either at play or when in sudden alarm they go bounding off across country. Their movements may be best explained to those who have not seen this wonderful sight by the simile that they appear to move on mechanically perfect steel springs ; for so it appears when one's astounded eyes endeavour to take in and estimate the distance and height of those wonderful leaps, which they take with such consummate ease and light, airy grace.

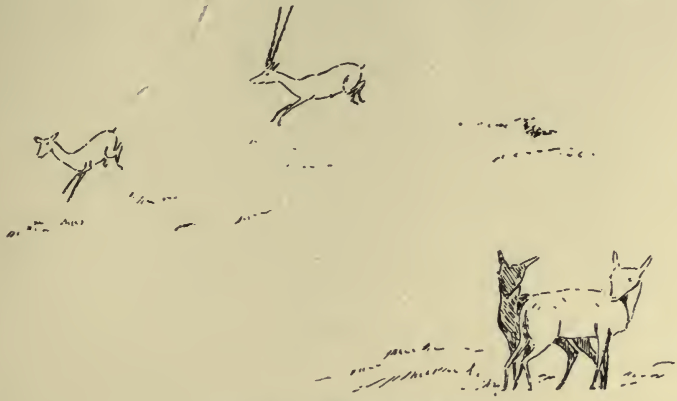
Beautiful, most beautiful, and dainty amongst all the Creator's creatures are these little beings.

Old bucks can be distinguished by their almost black colour, the belly being white, and by their long black spiral horns. The closeness of the spiral and divergence of the two horns vary. 30¾ inches is supposed to be a record head. A 24 inch would now be considered very good and anything over 18 inch shootable. The height at the shoulder is 2 feet 8 inches and weight 85 lbs. Horned females are occasionally to be found.

One evening in the hot weather I sat down and watched a herd, consisting of a youngish buck, with a fair head, and a few does. If you have never done this you will often find it a most amusing, if not instructive, proceeding. One thing I learnt that evening—to wit, that the gentler sex, be she a gentle and fair maiden, or a timorous antelope or deer, have all received and absorbed the same sort of instruction from their foremothers—Eve and company.

This evening the gay young spark of a buck commenced a kind of 'chase me' with one of the more beautiful young does of his harem. They were just like two children at play. The doe would run for a time in small circles, whose radii got shorter and shorter, the buck following exactly in her tracks. Suddenly, when there was scarce space to turn in, the doe would shoot away, and, with the craftiness of her wily sex, gradually draw the buck onward and onward, just ever keeping out of his reach in the most elusive manner, until she had taken him to some distance from the rest of the herd and had him all to herself.

Many times have I watched this manœuvre with secret delight. It is really as good as play, or far better. I stole a glance at the other does of the harem. Oh, no! they were taking no notice of the performance. Of course not! And yet I could see the hair bristling with indignation on the neck and shoulders and along the dorsal ridge of that old matron over there, who is perfectly aware of the giddy goings-on of her Lord and Master. And those two small, delicate, pretty young maidens hard by, into whose shapely long ears the handsome buck has often breathed sweet nothings on soft warm moonlight nights, when the dew lay like pearls on leaf and stem, and the soft breeze sighed and whispered through the perfumed grass. What think they? Ostentatiously they have turned their backs on the performance, and are apparently grazing in dual happiness and peace. But if ever jealousy, green-eyed jealousy, was writ in large characters on a face and in an attitude, it was depicted as large as life in the eyes and figures of those young does.



A black buck and doe at play.

'The giddy old ruffian,' I thought. 'What a time he'll have of it when next the old matron gets near him!' And the two jealous maidens!

But I have little doubt that he has long ago taken their measure, and a little preening of his best feathers before them and a little soft sawder will bring them into line all right!

These beautiful little antelope are by no means naturally wary. In fact, they soon become very tame if left alone and undisturbed by the rifle. When come across in areas where there is a fair amount of scrub jungle into which they can retire easily, and when not shot at incessantly in an open country, it is not difficult to get near them to study their wonderful grace and agility and their happy little ways—a pursuit which to my mind is far more fascinating than shooting them down.

If, however, much shot at in the open cultivated tracts which form their chief abode, they become very wild, and stalking them becomes a difficult matter, if not a high art.

Of course, recourse can always be had to a pair of bullocks, or a country-cart drawn by bullocks. The antelope are so used to seeing the villagers engaged in the fields with their plough oxen, or driving them across the open maidan to the village back from work, to seeing the village cattle going out from the village in the morning and returning at night, and to the appearance of bullock-carts going up and down the main and feeder roads, that they take no notice of them.

It is therefore easy to get near a herd by keeping to the lee-side of a pair of bullocks driven towards it, or by approaching the herd in a bullock-cart.

I can't say that these methods particularly recommend themselves to me.

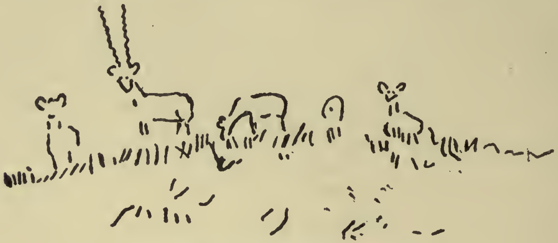
The real game begins when one tries to stalk a wary herd across the open plain.

Not long ago I took on a stalk of this nature. It was on a hot April morning in the Central Provinces, and the sun was already beginning to get unpleasantly warm when I set out on the flat of my stomach across the open grassy plain, with no prospect in front of me of being able to make use of a helpful termite heap or anything in the shape of a small bush or large tussock of grass to shield me from the all too keen and persistent gaze of the herd. The position resolved itself into just a slow, tortuous crawl on my stomach—and nothing else for it. I had to go from 350 to 400 yards, and it took me three-quarters of an hour. By the end of this period I was very fagged, very hot and wet, extremely aching about the shoulder-blades, and had got to within 70 yards of the nearest doe, and I did not dare squirm along another foot. And I missed the buck after all! I draw a veil over the things I remembered to mention in the heat of my disappointment as the buck went off in a series of most disconcerting leaps and bounds, for the bullet had whizzed very close to him, and he was frightened.

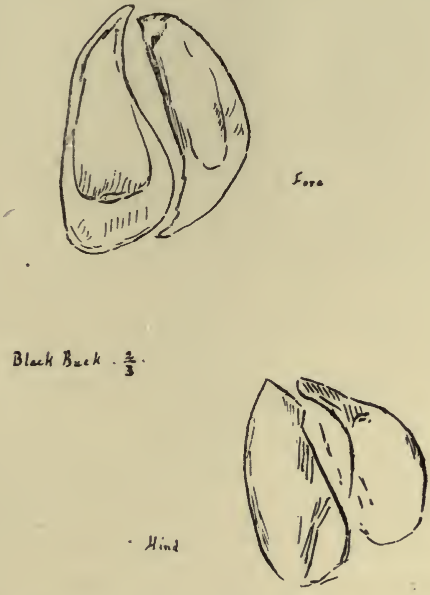
I fancy we all remember to say a few words after a difficult stalk followed by a miss!

Although black buck really live in the open country, i.e. in the great cultivated tracts of the country, they are occasionally to be found in outlying patches of forest in the neighbourhood of dense forest tracts.

I have noticed in Northern India that they are extremely shy of elephants, and will always clear out at once from a piece of forest through which an elephant is beating. On many occasions I have put in an elephant at one end of a small piece of forest and stationed myself at the other. Whilst the elephant is to be heard still at some distance, swaying along in the forest and quite beyond view, the black buck will come to the edge and be off across the open country. It is a curious trait, since animals living in these localities must often see elephants, and we all know that on an elephant one can often get up within a few yards of a sambhar or chitul with impunity.


I missed the buck after all.

The tracks of buck are larger and more pointed than those of the chink or the 4-horned antelope, and, of course, infinitely smaller than those of the nilgai, the only other Indian Antelope.



Tracks of buck.

THE BLUE BULL OR NILGAI

Of all the Indian antelope, the heavy, clumsy-built nilgai (*Portax pictus*) or blue bull, as he is popularly called owing to his peculiar colouring, is one of the most curious. Very few points of either the antelope or deer tribe has he about him. As one watches him trot with his awkward, shambling gait, or gallop in a lollopy, lumbering fashion across the plain, the animal he has the greatest similarity to is a coarse Galloway pony.

In some ways a bull is a handsome beast, with his well-shaped body and clean legs, but his extraordinary high wither spoils his appearance. He has no trophy, since the small pair of black horns the head carries are only some 8–9 inches in length. Baldwin mentions a pair of some 10½ inches, which would constitute a record.

The does are light-coloured, but an old bull (they are termed 'bull,' though strictly speaking they should be called 'buck') is almost blue-black in colour, from whence he gets his name of the blue bull. His coat shines like satin, and as he stands in the sunlight with clean legs planted well apart and head held well up on the look out for danger, there is something good and clean bred about him which rather fetches the lover of horses.

It is only when he commences to move that disillusionment sets in, and one wonders how such an apparently well set-up beast can possibly have such awkward paces.

It is probably his curious resemblance to a horse that makes one reluctant to raise a rifle against this timid animal, for up to a certain point they are very timid and shy. This is perhaps due to the fact that they inhabit open grassy plains interspersed with patches of scrub forest and cultivation.

In fact, I think it would be a pity to shoot the creatures at all were it not for the very great harm they do to the crops of the villagers. Also, a young blue bull furnishes a fine supply of meat for the camp, and affords the villagers a good square meal at the same time, and this to the shikari encamped next to a village is always a consideration; for the first golden rule for the sportsman to bear in mind is that he will get far more sport and a much greater enjoyment out of it if he has the villagers amongst whom he is living on his side, than if they are against him or merely lukewarm.

The villagers naturally know all about the animals in their neighbourhood. It would be curious indeed if they did not. Spend a fortnight or a month at one camp on end, and you will soon find that you know a good deal about the surrounding neighbourhood and something about the animals who inhabit it and their abundance. Picture to yourself living in that place and constantly, when engaged in your ordinary avocations, coming across the jungle denizens. It would not be surprising if you were able to tell a visitor what he might expect in the shooting-line. What were the beats of the local tigers and leopards, where the chitul were to be found, and the localities where there was the best chance of finding a big sambhar, and where the nilgai and black buck grazed in the mornings and evenings, and where they lay up during the heat of the day.

The local villager possesses all this information. But the villager knowing, and the villager giving the Sahib khubbar, are two very different things. Therefore, if you want sport, treat the villager well, and do him well, and you will find he will mostly play up to you.

I remember going out one morning at dawn with the express object of endeavouring to bag a blue bull, as meat was badly wanted in the camp, and the only village near me had sent in a deputation asking the Sahib to rid them of one of the destroyers of their crops, and at the same time give them a ‘belly-full,’ as they expressed it, of meat. As meat was required, and I did not wish to fire a shot in the forest, as I was on the look out for a bison or a good sambhar head, I acquiesced to the wish of the deputation.

My guide took me in an almost undeviating line for the spot where he told me we should be certain to find a herd of does, with perhaps a bull.

It was a beautiful morning towards the end of April in Central India. Already it should have been very hot, but a curiously unusual season had been experienced with heavy rain for several days in the middle of the month, and this had brought down the temperature in a most remarkable manner. But more than this, the rain coming down on a soil which was already burnt to a fiery heat had caused the herbaceous seeds to literally ' jump,' with the result that the grassy glades in the forest and the open maidans and savannahs gleamed like wonderful green emerald jewels, with the brilliant tints of the young grass shoots everywhere sprouting in the dank heat, resulting from the sun and moisture combined.

The rain had caused the animals to disperse somewhat in the jungles, since water could now be found everywhere. Tarns and lakes and tanks and babbling brooks and dry, stony-bedded nullahs had all filled up to an unusual height for the season—the middle of the hot weather.

Perhaps more curious still, heavy dews were now experienced every night, where but a short time previously one had gone out before dawn to find every leaf and dry stick crackling under foot.

So on the morning which I have in my mind the atmosphere was as clear as crystal, and almost was there a sharp touch in the air. As the level rays of the sun shot over a low distant ridge, plain and hill-top shimmered softly in the ambient pink light, and the dew shone in sparkling drops like miniature jewels on leaf and grass tip. A shimmering yellow-pink haze hung over the country, and out in the grass areas the dhak (*Butea frondosa*) trees—the flame of the forest—now in full flower, dashed vivid crimson patches across the soft pinks and yellows and vivid greens of the landscape.

As one strode along behind the eager villager, who already in his mind's eye saw one of his enemies laid low and hot steaks for his evening meal, one thought that these shikar periods made life in India good at times to live.

Suddenly we arrive at the edge of a small cliff. The drop to the river-bed was some twenty feet, the river, one of quite considerable size for this part of the world, being some 30 yards across. The purling limpid blue stream which should have been trickling along its sinuous course down the semi-rocky, semi-sandy mud bed was there no longer, and in its place a dirty yellow-coloured flood now rolled. A ford had to be carefully sought, as it was in a dip on the top of the opposite cliff between its edge and the forest beyond that we hoped to find the blue bull.

Proceeding up stream, we at length found a fordable place and crossed in silence. Climbing up the opposite bank, we crawled quietly up the gentle rise and looked over into the dip.

Yes, there were the blue bull right enough, but all light bluish-grey in colour—does only. There were five of them, two old beasts, and three of younger and intermediate ages, one being but a large calf.

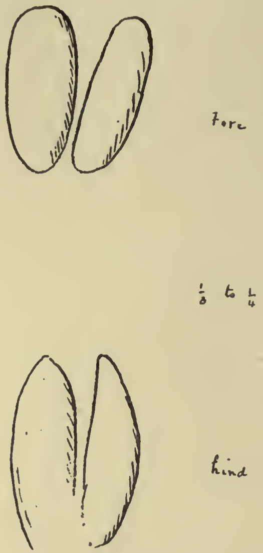
Looking away to the right, I saw the bull, and a big bull he was, dark blue-black in colour, with his glossy coat glistening in the early rays of the sunlight, and in places sparkling with dew-drops. They were all grazing, and had I not naturally wished to bag the bull, I could have dropped one of the cows in her tracks.

The bull was, as I have said, to the right, and it became necessary to execute a movement to the rear if I wanted to get a shot at him.

How I longed for a pony to ride the fine old fellow down instead of thus tamely plugging him! The country, though black cotton soil, was quite rideable if one did not mind chancing a spill or two, and provided one goes hard enough at first so as to press and pump the animal, he is fairly easily ridden to a standstill. I was thinking this as, after executing a flanking movement, I cautiously pushed my head up over the rise. Yes, there was the bull, but he was on the *qui vive.*

Why, I could not say. And there was a cow advancing towards the top of the dip; she must have moved forward after I had started on my flank movement. Perhaps that seventh sense which is never asleep in the wild animal troubled her. Whatever the cause, I was too late! The cow, before topping the ridge, squealed, and the old bull was off into the patch of forest before I could get anything like a sight upon him.

The cows went away to the left, and in a few strides dropped into their lumbering trot and fell into single file, which appears to be an invariable habit of theirs. In a *sauve qui peut* each one goes off with a blind rush, but it does not last long or far, and they will be shortly seen to close up and drop into single file in a most automatic manner. I watched the does do this as they followed the river bank up stream for some



Tracks of nilgai.

distance, and then, swerving across the plain to the east, topped a rise and disappeared.

The villager wished me to go after them, but I was obdurate. I had started out on this quest with a kind of feeling that I was going into Windsor Park to shoot one of the deer there. It was not turning out so easy a game as I had imagined, but I thought the least I could do was to stick to the bull.

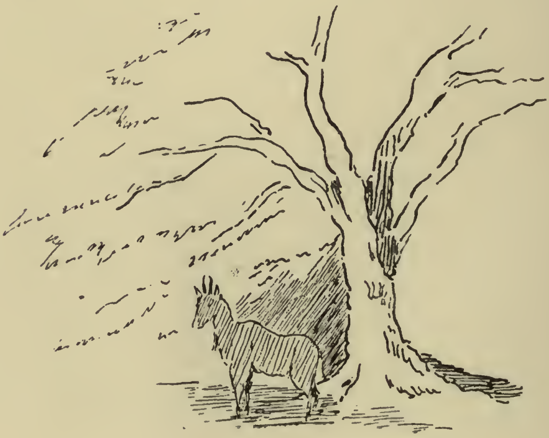
It was but another instance of the many that the shikari has to experience before he learns thoroughly the golden rule, *never* despise your game whatever he may be so long as he comes under the designation *feræ naturæ*. I had met and shot blue bull many times before, but I discovered that I had still something to learn.

We followed the bull's tracks, long rather narrow elliptical impressions plainly discernible in the soft soil, slowly through the patch of forest and out into the grassy plain beyond, down into the river-bed, which made a loop here, and down this for some distance. He had soon slowed down into the shambling trot and then into a walk. The river-bed, with its heavy, deep, sandy mud, was bad walking, but we pursued our way down for about half a mile, and then the tracks went up a natural animal-run into the grass land again. I looked round, but could see nothing! I felt sure that the bull must be somewhere quite close. At the rate he had been going latterly he could not have gone far. Again I looked and searched the whole area in front of me, to my front and left and right. No! I could see no trace of any animal on the open grass land which lay spread before my eyes, much less of such a large beast as a blue bull, as my eye swept slowly round until it had nearly reached the cliff edge to my right. I was about to give it up and turn to the shikari behind, when — suddenly a flicker. I looked. Yes! There was the bull standing beneath a twisted mimosa tree, with the flickering sun shadows on his back—watching me.

It is wonderful how a beast of this size can hide itself practically in the open by instinctively taking up such a position as to make it seem part and parcel of its environment. Here beneath this feathery foliaged tree, with the light and shadow playing upon it, the bull to the casual glance was invisible.

I did not wait this time, but sighting on the shoulder, put a bullet through his heart.

The rest I left to the men. I do not like shooting blue bull, as I have said. It is too like shooting a pony!



CHAPTER V

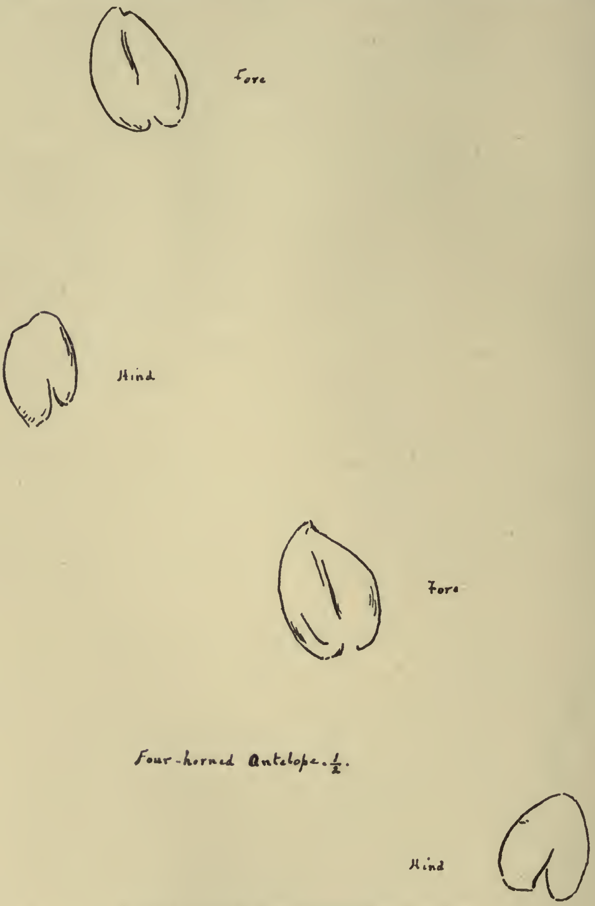
The four-horned antelope—Habits—Tracks—Head scarcely a trophy—The chinkara or ravine deer—Buck and does horned—Habits and distribution—Lives in desert tracts—Stalking—A midday stalk—Fascination of the desert—Chink tracks—A morning's stalk—A curious desert beetle—The greater bustard—Death of the buck.

THE FOUR-HORNED ANTELOPE

A PRETTY little creature is the four-horned antelope, pretty and daintily made, though he cannot vie in beauty with his cousin, the black buck of the open country, or the chinkara of the sandy deserts.

Although so lightly built, his movements are much more like the barking deer, though not so heavy and awkward. Still, for his size and make, it is surprising how heavy afoot he is.

You put him up in grass jungle, and watch him go bounding away through the grass. He goes away in bounds and leaps, it is true; but they are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Four-horned Antelope. 1/2.
Hind

Tracks of the four-horned antelope.

heavy, almost ungainly ones, in which one misses the airy grace and lightness of the black buck.

The little four-horned antelope is a frequenter of grass jungles, being found out in the grass where the savannahs are interspersed with forest areas, only returning to the shade of the forest about midday in the hot weather. Though it is not uncommon to find them out in the open, lying up in a small nullah or ravine during the day. Their tracks are dainty little impressions resembling to some extent those of the chinkara.

They are by no means so shy, or else do not possess the same quick instinct and sense of hearing and smell of the other deer, for it is comparatively easy to get near them, and, in fact, it is not uncommon to put them up at one's feet. The head is, of course, of small size, and scarcely a trophy. The four horns are placed in pairs, the shorter in front ; the latter are very small, being as often as not mere knobs, whilst the larger ones are placed behind, and may be as much as 3 or 4 inches in length. Height 25 inches, weight 43 lbs.

THE CHINKARA OR RAVINE DEER

The little ' chink,' as he is familiarly known to sportsmen, the chinkara, Indian gazelle, or ravine deer (*Gazella bennetti*), is a most graceful little antelope, and runs the black buck close in points of beauty. He is, however, much smaller than the black, and his horns in comparison to those of the latter are small. They are, however, by no means ungraceful, and a well-mounted head has a great deal of beauty in it, although a decent horn with its handsome rings will not measure more than 13–14 inches in length, and forms a delicate and beautiful little trophy.

Both the males and females are horned, unlike the black buck, where the female is hornless, except in the case of a freak. The horns of the buck are straight, and have usually about fifteen or sixteen rings in them. The horns of the female are ringless.

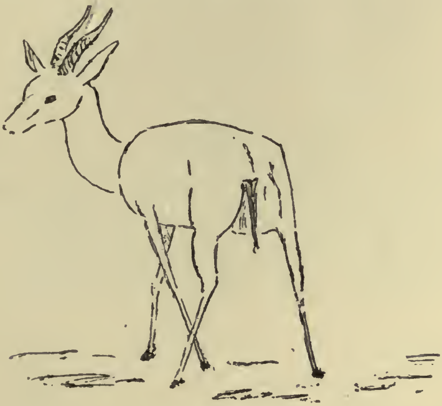
A record head of 15 inches comes from Rajputana. The average horn measurement may be taken at 9 inches.

The Indian gazelle is light chestnut in colour above, both males and females, the sides, buttocks, chin, breast, and lower parts being white, the tail black, and knees dark brown. The face is dark rufous, with a white streak down it.

The little chink is widely distributed, though perhaps not so generally as the black buck. He is to be found from south of the Kistna in Madras right up into the North-West, and extending into the plains of Baluchistan. Unlike the black buck, however, it is seldom found near cultivation, or on alluvial lands. Its habitat *par excellence* is the desert tracts of the country, where it is to be found in small parties in ravines and broken ground, or out in the sandy desert amongst the sand-hills, where it feeds upon the coarse herbage or on the leaves of the desert shrubs. He is, perhaps, particularly abundant in the great desert tracts of

Central India, Sind, and Rajputana. This little antelope is said never to drink.

You will find that when stalking him, although he is not particularly shy or wary, he exhibits a curious restlessness, always moving on, and when really startled goes off like the wind in the beautiful leaps and bounds affected by the gazelles.



A chinkara buck.

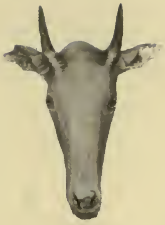
This restlessness is the chief difficulty to be faced in stalking him—this and the fact that his colouring is so near to that of the desert sand and his natural surroundings, that he becomes exceedingly difficult to 'pick up' when he has gone anything over 100 yards; and it is a common thing for a herd of these little antelope to run clean out of sight, simply and solely due to the fact of their colouring so closely resembling that of their surroundings.

The experience one learns after a few fruitless stalks after this dainty little animal, is to aim and fire quickly once one has got within reasonable distance of a shot proving effective.

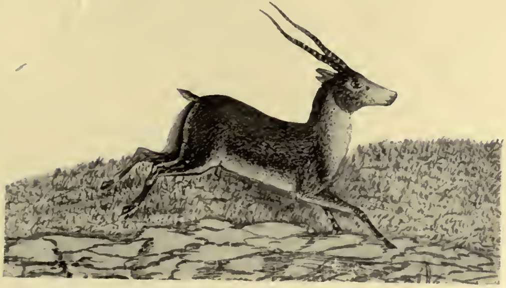
When out on treks in the desert tracks of the country, whether on duty or pleasure, a few hours after gazelle are well repaid, since the flesh is most excellent eating; the weight of a buck is some 50 lbs., the animal standing some 26 inches at the shoulder, whilst a doe weighs about 10 lbs. less.

One can look back to many pleasant hours spent stalking these graceful antelope, and though you might think that each day or each stalk after them would be more or less similar to one another, yet they are *not*. I do not think I have ever had two stalks alike in my life, and therein lies the fascination of stalking, one of the best forms of shooting in existence. Incidents arise, constantly arise, trivial in themselves perhaps at the time of meeting them, but how often does one look back to some one or more of those trivial incidents and reflect that such and such a one in all probability cost one the loss of a fine head or a fine pelt. Therein lies the fascination of the whole game, and it is he who learns to treat each little incident arising during a stalk as of supreme importance who will have the greatest success.

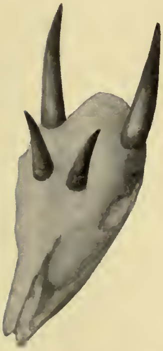
It was a hot morning in May in the sandy desert plains of Baluchistan that I made my first



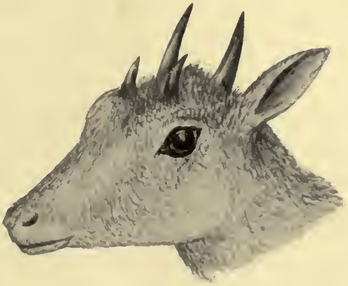
HEAD AND HORNS OF THE NILGAI OR BLUE BULL



THE BLACK BUCK



HORNS OF 4-HORNED ANTELOPE



HEAD OF BUCK 4-HORNED ANTELOPE

acquaintance with chink. Well do I remember the occasion. I had just come off a long tonga journey, arriving at a dák bungalow about midday. A tub and breakfast was what I had in my mind's eye. The dák bungalow Khansammah, however, who had but one wretched murghi in the place, as I subsequently discovered, had another programme in store for me.

'Has the Protector of the Poor got a rifle with him?' he inquired. 'Yes, he has,' was the answer; a rifle which, according to the orderly, had killed every known animal, from the *shaitan* of a man-eating tiger to the gorgeous plumaged peacock (hit by the luckiest of flukes).

'Will the Sahib shoot a chink?' The Sahib considered. Frizzling hot was it outside, and the hot wind was just commencing to blow. Invitingly cool was it in the darkened, even if very dirty, dak bungalow; but the temptation to see, if not shoot, a chink proved too strong, and we sallied forth.

Phew! it was hot as we plodded across the sandy plain towards a small depression with a low sand-hill this side of it, where my guide, one of the dirty khits or masalchis of the bungalow, told me we should find the gazelle.

I was ploughing my way through the sand, sweeping the plain every now and then ahead of me, when suddenly the man in front, with an exclamation, stopped and pointed to my right. I looked. There, scarcely 40 yards away, were a number of small yellowish red antelope on the move, some looking round as they edged slowly off. I looked hard at them. Yes, I could see the small horns on several of the antelope. But how small they looked, and how difficult to see against the yellow sand. Instead of dropping and firing at once, I followed slowly, hoping to get a shot against the sky line. Now, as the herd disappeared over a small sand-hillock, I ran crouching over the sand, and then warily crawled to the top of the hill. Sixty yards only I estimated, and I sighted on the biggest buck. Even as I was about to press the trigger the buck moved forward, and after crawling and creeping some 30 yards, the animals again went off at a smart canter. I had gone some two miles or more in this fashion ; the heat was terrific, my temper and patience gave out, and I risked a long shot—and missed. And so a hot tramp in a fiery wind back to the bungalow, vowing I would have a buck that evening. I went out, but saw none.

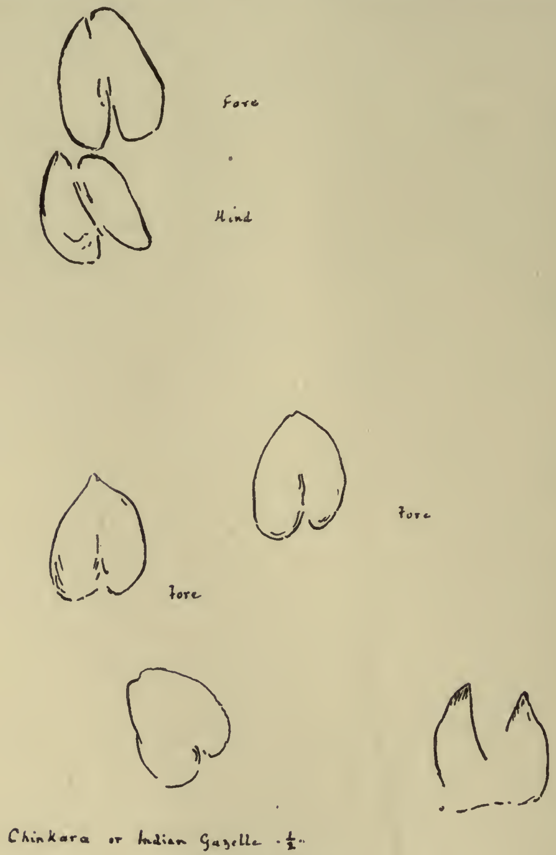
It is curious the wonderful fascination the desert has for some men. Whether it be the peculiar feeling of aloofness from the world and abodes of man which invades one when amidst those billowy oceans of sand, or the great silence which almost makes itself felt, or the wonderful charm of the colouring, the hard yellows and reds and browns reduced and toned to the softest and most bewildering of shades as the sun sinks to the horizon. I know not which of these factors is responsible, or whether it is a blending of them all ; but the fascination is there, and once felt calls to one ever afterwards.

In the barren wild sandy plains of Baluchistan, encircled and shut in by rugged and precipitous hills and mountains, their crests cut up into a thousand fantastic and bizarre shapes, one has often paused in amazement at the almost incredible colouring taken on by rock and sand in the early morning or late evening light. Golden yellow and brilliant crimson, vivid purple and bright brown-blue, red and orange, all mingle together in one chaotic riotous feast of colour, whilst as the sun sinks lower the desert itself runs into a sea of blood so startlingly and cruelly vivid as to leave one paralysed at the thoughts it conjures. The golden rim drops below the rocky crest and the scene shuts down abruptly from an indescribable undreamt-of mass of wild colouring to dark, cold, forbidding greys and blues and blacks, with a grey-white ribbon in the foreground, and night is here.

The tracks left by chink in the sand are easy to recognize once they have been examined carefully. To my mind the only other animal they might be confused with is the 4-horned antelope.

Truly they are tantalizing little animals, these gazelle, at times.

I spent one ever-memorable hot and interesting morning after what I conceived to be a record


Fore
Hind
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Fore
Chinkara or Indian Gazelle · ½ ·

Tracks of chinkara.

head. The head was not a record, but, as a result of the stalk, my mind became stored with a considerable amount of jungle or desert lore, both on the habits of the chink and also on those of other things.

Do you know those queer black bulbous-looking beetles one meets so commonly in desert areas, all body with a small head and like unto nothing quite that one meets on cultivated tracts or in forest areas? Common to all desert tracts are they, for they are to be found upon the veldt and elsewhere in the world. A queer insect is he, and always appears to be so decidedly in earnest, though he never seems to be doing anything material nor going anywhere in particular. I have lain upon the sand and watched them, but have not assimilated very much about their habits. What they feed upon, if, indeed, they do feed, I know not. Nor where they lay their eggs. The one thing about them that I do know is that they are plentiful, as plentiful as the sands I was going to write.

As I was setting out on a search for the buck I have above alluded to, I put up a greater bustard (*Eupodotis Edwardsi*). A handsome bird this, but assimilates to the ostrich in some of his ideas. After running some 30 yards, he put his head under a small tuft of grass and imagined he was hidden. This he did several times as I slowly advanced towards him. I did not intend shooting him on the ground, and he apparently thought he was unobserved.

He is a sandy buff and mottled in colouring, and resembles to a marked degree his desert surroundings. In fact, I found that at 40 yards he had already become to some degree indistinct. After I, or we, had proceeded some quarter of a mile in this manner, I grew rather tired of the bird's idiotic manœuvring, and the next time he put his head in a bush I started running. He spotted this alteration in my tactics, withdrew his head in a hurry and running a few strides launched himself in the air with a great fluster, when I dropped him. He proved the most excellent eating with a certain claret sauce, known to an excellent chef of a friend of mine.

The sun had already got to some height above the horizon when we at last discerned a herd of gazelle.

After a careful examination through the glasses I came to the conclusion there was nothing big amongst the lot, and was just going to lower them when to the left I noted a movement, and up got a buck with what I took to be a very fine pair of horns. 'Should be a record,' I muttered.

The buck ran about half-way across a flat, sandy plain intersected by a ravine, near the edge of which they stood. They had not apparently perceived us, and seeing that there was no cover on the plain, we moved back and made a cast to the right and got behind a low sand-hill, by keeping to the lee-side of which we could approach the ravine.

Once in this, we thought, matters would be plain sailing. The ravine, however, was by no means easy work ; it was filled with loose brown sand which proved heavy walking, and it zigzagged about in a most extraordinary manner. Carefully as we proceeded we went astray, for on looking over the edge, when we calculated we had got low enough, the gazelle were nowhere to be seen. I swept with the glasses every spot I could get at. Not a trace. We knew they had not crossed the ravine, as we should have seen their trail. We climbed up out of the ravine and stood on the plain again, and the riddle was solved. Away to the right was a small depression in the surface of the sand, and almost as it caught our eyes a doe's head appeared on its farther side. Another and another followed. A buck's head appeared. I raised the rifle. It was not the big one though. The does caught the movement. They fronted round and looked at me squarely ; then faced about and were off like the wind.

I had no eyes for them, however. Two other does appeared. Where on earth was the buck ? Suddenly to the left a yellow-brown shadow appeared to shoot forward. He went like an arrow for about 30 yards in a series of magnificent bounds. Then stopped and half turned to look. That halt was fatal. As he rose in the leap that was to recommence the flight for safety, my bullet caught him in the shoulder, and he fell kicking on the sand.

He was in his death-throe as I got up and stood beside him. What a beautiful dainty little animal, and how wonderfully soft and liquid the large lustrous eyes, now, alas, with a last reproachful hauntingly appealing look, glazing into death!

What does it feel like to be a murderer? Are the feelings worse than those experienced on such occasions?

PART III

PELTS

CHAPTER I

Tiger—The King of jungle sports—Tiger country—Knowledge of country necessary for successful beating—Aid of native shikaris—Tiger 'pugs' or tracks—Size of tigers—Number of cubs born—Beating up tiger with elephants—Thrilling work—Glorious jungle scenery—Waiting for the beating elephants—'Stripes' unwilling—The broken line—Different behaviour of beaten tigers—A difficult beat and a long wait—Some queer neighbours—'There's many a slip'—Beating out a cur—Breaks back—Rout of the tiffin elephant—Half-hearted charges—Lies close—The cur meets his deserts—Padding the tiger.

BEATING FOR TIGER

IT does not fall to the lot of the average shikari man in India to enjoy tiger-beating *par excellence* with a long line of elephants. Those whose luck it has been to participate in this luxurious form of sport will surely agree that for thrilling excitement, when tiger are afoot, and more especially when wounded tiger are afoot, it is hard to beat.

But it is the sport of kings and princes, bejewelled rajas (did not the mere name of raja conjure up to us in our nursery days weird, gorgeous beings heavily decked out in gold and jewels ?), Viceroys and Lieutenant-Governors, the deputies of kings, and such minor fry as commissioners, moneyed globe-trotters, and suchlike.

For to enjoy this form of sport in its pristine excellence not only requires a long purse, but, added thereto, more than a nodding acquaintance with the great powers that be, which gives that interest and power in the land which literally results in a shower of shikar elephants being poured upon one by their gilded possessors. For to few of us is it given to be in the position to keep a stable of elephants with that reckless disregard of cost which animates the subaltern of cavalry in maintaining his string of polo ponies.

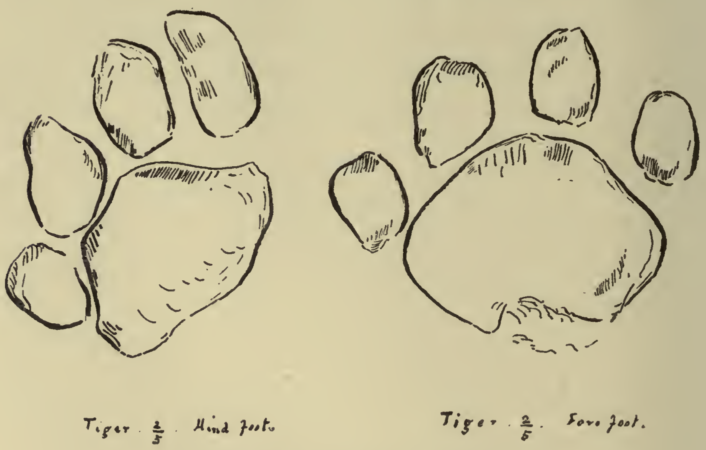
I have often heard men say that they do not consider tiger-beating with elephants real sport. That the wretched tiger has not a dog's chance with a great line of elephants beating him up through the grass jungle. This may apply to parts of the country, but it certainly does not to the glorious Terai jungles of Northern India and along the foot of the Himalaya.

To make sure of getting the tigers of these parts up to the line requires one to possess the craft and guile of the serpent added to that of the tiger himself.

One must know the jungle like one's own hand. Every *rao* bed and large nullah, every little ravine running into the hills must be marked down and 'stopped' if one wants to make sure of putting the tigers up to the guns, and even with all this hardly acquired knowledge one is so often 'left'!

The acquisition of this necessary jungle lore is one of the most fascinating parts of the whole sport. The knowledge how to practically force a tiger to take a certain line of country so as to face one or other of a line of guns placed in position, be they in a howdah, machan, or on foot, is only attained by a long and careful study of the habits of the lord of the jungles himself, together with those of what may be called accessory animals, and by the possession of an intimate acquaintance with the ground. That this work can be entirely left to the native shikari many of us know to be impossible. Valuable help he can give in making us acquainted with the peculiarities of the local tiger, since each tiger differs in many small ways and habits, just as human beings do, and this knowledge the local men are always able to afford. They can also recognize a particular tiger by his 'pugs' or tracks, evidences of his whereabouts which even the tiger cannot help leaving behind him. But to depend upon the local shikaris entirely is a very different matter. On occasions all will go well and the tigers will appear, but how oft is the reverse the case ?

We most of us know that nowadays when rifles are yearly becoming more numerous, it is to the interest of the local native shikaris that the tigers of their locality should not be shot in too large numbers, for thereby the greater number of sahibs will visit their jungles and the greater will be the amount of baksheesh they will earn ! This may not apply so forcibly to the sportsman who appears with a line of twenty elephants or so, for he will probably have behind him the sort of power


Tiger. $\frac{2}{5}$. Hind foot.
Tiger. $\frac{2}{5}$. Fore foot.

The pugs of a tiger, fore* and hind.

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* The fore foot of a tiger has five toes, the hind four.

which even the native shikari will have to respect, and the tigers are turned out if skill of man can bring this consummation about.

But for those who have not this power behind them, my advice is, trust not blindly to the native shikari if you wish to really enjoy good sport.

The average length of the tiger (*Felis tigris*) from tip to tip is 9 feet 6 inches, the tail being normally a little less than ⅓rd total length. A skin of this size will, however, stretch to nearly 12 feet. Tigresses measure from 8 feet to 8 feet 9 inches. The record tiger measured probably about 12 feet. Anything over 10 feet would now-a-days be good. To measure a tiger lay him out on his side straight and then run the tape from the tip of the nose between the ears to the tip of the tail closely following the curves of the body.

The period of gestation of the tiger is 14 to 15 weeks. Two cubs, born between December and June, is the number usually reared and they are to be found with the mother till nearly full grown.

Have you ever occupied a howdah in a line of thirty elephants, slowly beating through grass jungle properly stopped ahead ? If so, you will know what pure unalloyed excitement and joy is !

How you thrill at every rustle ahead as you stand rifle at the ready, ‘ giving ’ to the swaying motion of the howdah, prepared for a snapshot at a glancing streak of yellow suddenly appearing out of and disappearing into the grass so like in colouration to itself. Or ready for that far more exciting moment, the direct charge of a real fighting royal tiger who means business. Body and mind are braced up to breaking-point with the concentration necessary to emerge successfully from this ordeal, for on your hand and eye depend your elephant's safety. Should the tiger make good his charge and get home on the elephant's head or quarters, both you and the mahout are likely to have a rocky time of it for the next few moments, whilst the chances are that your elephant will have finished his career as a shikar one. For an elephant once mauled by tiger usually refuses to face 'stripes' ever after. And a 'bolter,' when a tiger is charging, is about as uncomfortable a mount to sit upon as could be found in a long day's march ; and more especially is this the case when one is in a howdah, for you cannot slip out of this with the same ease as you can slip off the pad.

As we move slowly along, it is difficult to keep one's eyes from the beautiful panorama before us. We are slowly swaying and swishing through a sea of thick, tall, yellow elephant-grass, which in places rears its last season's flower-stalks far above our heads. This grass clothes the edge of the nullah in a dense mass, and as we emerge from it into the *rao* bed we see in front of us a vivid green patch of shisham copse, now in the brave glory of its spring foliage, standing as a small island in the middle of the nullah bed, here some 200 yards broad. Other small islands of this tree, interspersed with the thorny acacia or khair, and often with a dense grass undergrowth, are to be seen in the bed of the river; likely spots to find 'stripes' at home, lying up after his heavy night's meal off the easily killed 'tie up' (a buffalo in these parts), dozing away the hot hours of the day with the murmuring sound of tinkling water in his ears. To our right, some 50 yards away, is the edge of the sál forest, the trees now clothed in their beautiful vivid green spring leafage. The strip of maidan forest here soon rises up into the closely adjacent foot-hills, those smiling outliers of the Great Himalayan Chain, all now covered with their brilliant spring garment—safe home of the big sambhar stags and the ever-open line of retreat for our tiger if he once gets a notion that we are on his tracks. Behind the smiling foot-hills rise, range on range, the beautiful ridges of the Himalaya ; in places clothed with dark black forest, in others the bare slopes covered with a now burnt-up short grass, gold burnished in colour, or tumbling sheer down in some yawning and frowning black beetling cliff. So clear is the atmosphere that the farthest peak appears but a few miles away, whilst over all is the great blue vault of that brilliant intense blue so particularly characteristic of the Indian hot weather. In the early morning and evening the lights on this beautiful panorama are soft and tender. Now everything is hard and clear-cut and gleaming, for the sun is directly overhead, throwing no shadow except that which each one of us stands upon, and the hot wind is blowing with a steady persistence and fierceness. Very unwilling will 'stripes' be to move at such an hour, and probably exceedingly angry when forced so to do.

But if it is exciting beating in line for tiger, it is even more intensely so when, placed in one's howdah in some favourable spot just at the edge of a patch of grass, one catches sight of the slowly advancing line of beating elephants. Only a howdah or two is amongst them, occupied by those who are in charge of the line, and responsible that the individual elephants keep their distance and do not straggle and allow gaps to intervene through which the tiger could sneak out. The rest of the elephants are pad ones, or have their mahouts alone on their heads, or perhaps a wildly excited grass-cut perched up aloft on their backs.

As they draw near, watch the line! You cannot help but admire the sagacious beasts, each one fully aware of the nature of the matter in hand, as they move slowly along to the voice of their mahouts, submerged to the shoulders in the long grass. The howdahs slowly sway from side to side as the great animals advance, crackling and swishing through the long and reedy jungle, whilst the khaki-clad occupants, rifle in hand, peer down into the yellow leafy wall, striving to pierce the jungle's depths as it bends and dips before the great black masses driving through it. Nearer they come, and still no sign! Can the tiger or tigers, for there may be more than one in the beat, have broken back?

The grass patch thins out here to a narrow strip. One of the occupants of the advancing howdahs sings out that one tiger is certainly in the grass, and yet now scarcely 20 yards separate one from the advancing line. At the point where the grass ends a second howdah and rifle is posted, whilst on the opposite side to myself is a third rifle. The elephants stand like bronze-black statues, trunks curled up in safety, ears forward, but not a quiver. The mahout's eyes roll swiftly from side to side. 'Where is the skulking *shaitan* (devil)?' he mutters. Nearer comes the line. One is positively tingling with excitement, but not a movement or rustle in the grass is to be seen, and the line is but ten yards away. Suddenly an uproar to my left front. Two elephants swerve outwards, trumpeting shrilly amidst the execrations of their own and the neighbouring mahouts! For a moment grass, elephants, and men appear to be in a wild turmoil. Ah! the line is broken! Though the beating elephants were almost touching one another, the tiger's courage failed him—for he was there right enough. He had funked facing the open, and had dashed back, breaking through the line of howdahless elephants.

Oh, that glorious five minutes! Worth days of the humdrum routine of life!

It is almost impossible to say how a tiger will behave in a beat of this nature, and therein lies the great fascination of the game.

We had been beating with a line of thirty elephants one day, and had lost two tigers in the morning. Both had sneaked out of the beat up small side ravines, and one of them in spite of stops being placed to prevent him.

It was a scorching hot April day with a fierce hot wind blowing, and after lunch the line was taken to a beat which was rarely drawn blank if properly worked. The howdahs were placed lining the top of a bank of a small grass-filled nullah, with an 8-foot drop on one side into the nullah bed. I had been allotted the end of the line at a spot where the grass thinned out and disappeared into a patch of forest. Given that the beast did not break near the other guns, I should be certain of a chance, and a good one, of coming to close quarters with 'stripes.' The beat was a difficult one to start, as the jungles on that side were very broad and broken up with ravines.

For what seemed a very long time I sat in my howdah and kept a watch, rather a casual one I am afraid, on the sea of grass down below in front of me, and with more interest upon the neighbouring tree trunks.

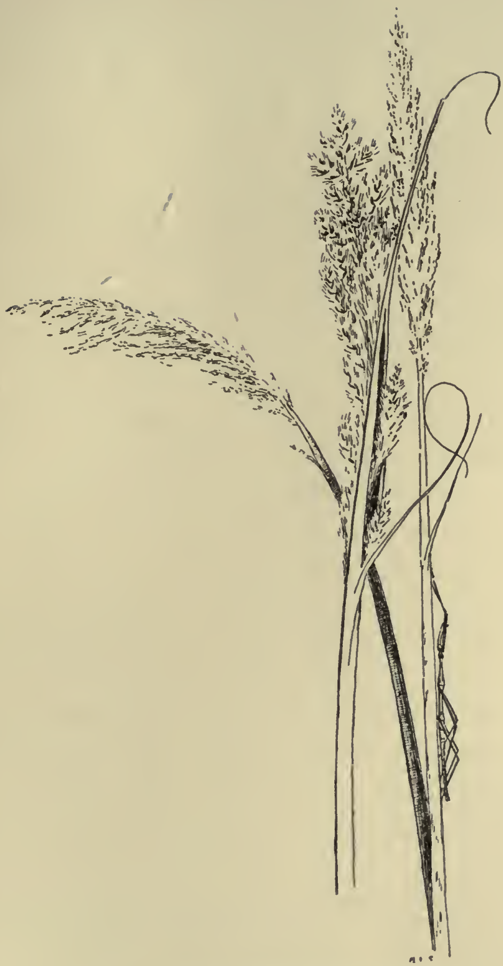
What are lizards made of, I wonder? The temperature was anything over 180°, and a scorching hot wind was blowing. Yet two lizards were playing hide-and-seek round the trunk of a sál tree with as much keenness as if the temperature was a grateful 60°. These little batrachians don't appear to sleep during the daytime, and since the greater number of the more tempting forms of insect life were taking a siesta during the great heat of the day (save the flies—they never sleep, I believe—and a few noxious, gaudy species), the lizards had nothing to do but to carry on in this foolish fashion, which made one perspire to look at them.

Some curious brilliant orange-red and green tree-bugs also claimed attention. They were not apparently inclined to keep up their circulation after the fashion of the lizards, and yet they appeared to feel the cold too, for they were huddled up close together (like a flock of sheep packed together for warmth in a snowstorm), portions of each flat body overlapping those of others, presumably to keep each other warm. I wonder what temperature would lead these queer forms of life to open out a button or two of their vests and comfortably bask!

I had glanced on several occasions at a tall grass stem close to me. I did not know why it attracted me, but it did. I seemed to have a sort of sub-conscious feeling that a portion of it had moved, and this annoyed me just sufficiently to make me keep half an eye upon it.

Yes, there it was again! It looked as if a part of one of the dead yellow leaf-sheaths had moved slightly up the stem it clasped. I looked more carefully this time, but could see nothing. Suddenly a thought struck me, and leaving the family party on the sál tree, who apparently found the temperature rather colder than was pleasing to them, I turned my full attention to the grass-stalk which reared itself up some 10 feet or so above my head.

Seeing my fixed stare in one direction, the mahout thought I was on the tiger, and for a time showed intense interest. This, however, subsided, as he began to think the sahib was daft. It required a lot of patience before that grass stem showed any signs of life again, but it did so eventually, and I saw my leaf-sheath slowly beginning to move up the stem. To any one with no natural history knowledge the problem would have remained an insoluble one, for the similarity of the moving grass piece to the stem was exact. And yet that moving grass piece was not grass, but an insect—one of the stick insects. He also did not appear incom-



A stick insect on a grass head.

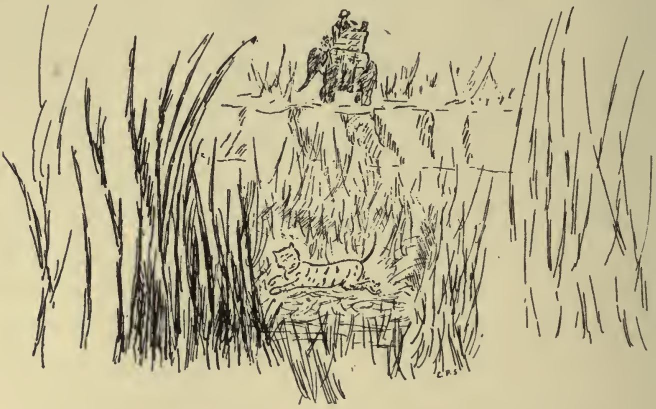
moded by the great heat, save that his movements were so appallingly slow that one longed to be able to help him move his feet a bit quicker. Doubtless he was slowly under weigh to partake of lunch, though why he could not choose the early morning or evening for his meals, like most wise animals, and why he should choose for his siesta a leaf-stalk in the full glare of a May tropic sun, were questions I was, and am, unable to answer.

Another fairly common denizen of these jungles whom you will come across is a curious red bat which gets up in the beat at times, and flies quietly and shadow-like over the grass heads, and goes to ground again on some stem. I saw one in this particular beat. He is a common bat of the great grass jungles of the north, and is as curious as he is fairly plentiful.

Whilst pursuing my natural history observations, I had now and then thrown my eye on to my nearest neighbour on the right, who was the only one I could see. He had been getting restive latterly, I had noticed—he and his elephant and mahout, apparently. Perhaps the tension or impatience of the one was communicated to the others.

I imagine he thought the beat was not going as it ought to. I certainly did appear to have been studying my neighbour's curious habits and attitudes for some time! Suddenly a crack like a pistol-shot—an elephant breaking a branch from a tree. My eyes went down to the sea of grass in front of me, and remained there. A distant rustling made itself heard, and slowly, very slowly, approached, with many halts during which the voice of a mahout raised in execration or exhortation came to me faintly. Away to my right on the opposite side of the nullah a black shape loomed up—a howdah elephant. It was B—— who had gone with the line and was doing flanking elephant. Owing to some difficult ravines, he had got thrown out a bit, and was now ahead of the line. He came on till he was about midway between the rifle to my right and myself, when he halted. The line slowly approached, and nothing showed afoot. Nor was I aware that anything had been seen. I saw out of the corner of my eye that the line had passed A—— to my right, as he was looking in my direction. If tiger there be, I thought, he should be mine. Suddenly down the centre of the grass, with tail cocked stiff over his back, came galloping a fine tiger. Although he must have more or less disappeared in the grass each time he touched ground, the impression left on my memory as he came bounding along (of which I made a rough sketch) is that he was in full view the whole time.

And a fine sight he was! He first appeared just above B——, and I saw the latter's rifle go up, and bang went a first barrel, followed quickly by the second. The tiger held steadily on without a sound. Now he was past B——, and making for me. As I fired he dropped into the long grass and disappeared. All was quiet. I saw him turn over, and so did my mahout, with much guttural joy that it should have been our day. This was the end of the beat, and as I saw that B—— had not a notion where the tiger had dropped, or even that it had dropped, as a bank had hid the later stages from him, we scrambled down the cliff on our side, and went up warily through the grass, shouting to him to cover his side. Slowly we approached the spot where the tiger had turned over, A—— coming up on the right, whilst the beating elephants were lined across in front. It was unnecessary, however, as 'stripes' had


Down the centre of the grass came galloping a fine tiger.

received his quietus and was dead enough. We came upon him, lying on his side in the tall grass, a fitting pall for the great cat.

In no other sport save shooting does the old adage, ‘There’s many a slip’ come in so often. One of B——’s bullets, a ·577 Express which there was no mistaking, had hit the tiger. The game beast, almost knocked to pieces with the terrific shock, had come gallantly on to me for all he was worth, and as I fired had dropped dead.

It is curious what an abject cur the tiger is, or some of the breed are, on occasions. I remember we had a tight and exciting time with a cur of the first water one morning. The beat was a somewhat difficult one to manage, as it consisted of a sea of tall grass on one side of a river-bed, flanked to the left by a wide open stony portion of the nullah bed, with the river itself flowing down a narrow channel on the farther side, and on the right by a cart-road, from the off-side of which sprang a low sál forest-covered hill. The grass merged ahead on the right into a small patch of dense forest, the under cover consisting, wherever the trees left sufficient space and light, of the dry, tall, thick elephant grass. The grass to the left of the forest gradually narrowed, until it formed a small, dense, triangular patch of some 20-30 yards in length, and about double that, perhaps, in breadth at the far end of the forest, beyond which was open stony river-bed. The great difficulty was to stop and guard the road, across which it was practically certain the tiger would attempt to break, as he would never face the wide-open spaces to the left and in front.

Until the beat approached the forest the howdahs—there were four of us, with three others in the line—remained in echelon on the right of, and ahead of, the beat, my place being No. 3 from the right. As we began to draw near the forest the line halted, and we four howdahs moved up the road in single file. I took third place on the road as we slowly advanced, having one howdah behind me. At a signal I halted, the front two howdahs continuing up the road. No. 2 halted at about sixty paces from me, whilst No. 1 disappeared from sight round a bend. The beat was not a nice one either for the beaters, who would have difficult work getting through the thick forest, nor for us, who could hope at best for a snap shot as the tiger sprang across the road and disappeared up the sál-covered hill on the opposite side.

In order to enable me to fire at an angle up the road, and thus get a fraction more time, whilst at the same time being free of the other rifles, the mahout forced the elephant to back a little way into the thick wall of the forest, and we then stood and waited in a tense silence.

No time was there this morning for natural history observations. The beat was a short one, and the tiger marked down in this area might be on us at any moment. As I peered into the thick-matted depths of the forest behind me now and then, I thought that rarely had it been my lot to see such a peculiarly favourable spot for 'stripes' to lie up in. The grass itself on the far side of the forest strip was dense, and thick enough to satisfy most that they were in a veritable Indian jungle. But the grass was child's play to the work that awaited the elephants once they started to force their way through the wall of forest, narrow though the area was.

The line came slowly on, but not a sound was to be heard in the forest behind one. Once we both thought we heard a stealthy rustle and a tiny twig snap ; but that was all, and the elephant stood like a stone and made no sign of the near proximity of a tiger.

On came the giant beaters, rustling and swishing through the long thick grass. A crash ! Ah ! the first elephants are entering the forest, and unwillingly so, apparently from the objurgations cast at them by their drivers. Cries, shouts, and that dull, muffled, drum-like sound of the goad beaten on the elephants' heads come through the forest to one, and the eyes almost ache from the strain one is putting them to in our efforts to keep a look out on every likely spot.

A glance to my right as I face the road shows that B—— has begun to close slowly up, and as the line nearly reaches me I advance slowly, in order to keep slightly ahead of it. We are now acting as stops as well as rifles.

Not a sign has been seen or heard of the tiger. Can he have slipped out? Suddenly, shouts and execrations from the middle of the line. My mahout whispers that the tiger had been viewed attempting to sneak back through a clump of tall grass between two of the beating elephants. Curses freely bestowed upon him by the mahouts, and clods of earth and other missiles flung in his direction cause him to change his mind, and he turns and slinks forward.

A cur apparently!

Again we move forward, and as we do so I notice coming up on the road behind B—— the pad-elephant which carried the lunch-baskets and boxes, with three gaudy, gold-bedizened khits in snowy pagris seated upon them.

We advanced slowly, and now the howdah in front of me commences to move forward, and the beating line is almost parallel. So narrow are the forest strip and grass to the far side of it becoming, that already the beating elephants are nearly touching each other in the line.

We reach a very tall and thick clump of grass standing on the edge of the forest and road, and I pushed on so as to be able to see the far side of it. As the beating elephants came through it, to my surprise I find that the lunch-elephant had come up between me and the nearest of the beaters—the men on her in a state of wild excitement, and apparently in ignorance of, or oblivious to, the fact that they were on a beast who had the reputation of being a confirmed bolter, and would no more face a tiger than a jungle fire.

Another patch of thick, tall grass, and as I ranged alongside it on the road there was a sharp rush. Strive as I would, I could see nothing—nothing at all. Another rush!

The grass was like a thick yellow wall, into which I dare not fire without being perfectly sure of my target. Suddenly wild pandemonium, and out of the grass just behind me dashes the lunch-elephant, his mahout cursing and exhorting and hammering and digging in his iron goad all in vain. On top is a swaying mass of lunch-boxes and baskets and men — their eyeballs starting out of their sockets, their snow-white pagris either off or flung in long streamers to the wind, each hair of their beards sticking straight out in their terror, whilst interspersed with prayers to Allah and *Bap re Baps* are frantic objurgations to the mahout to urge his beast to greater endeavours for the Shaitan of a yellow devil was after them all, and would surely get up among them.

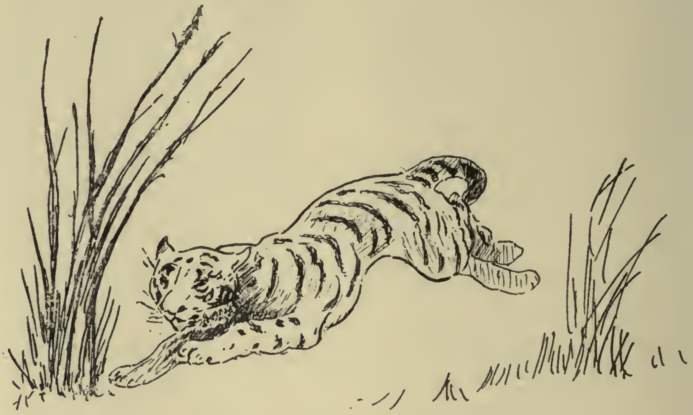
I don't think I have ever laughed so much in my life. The back view of that elephant doing time down the road bearing its mass of lunch and drink-baskets, and cursing and praying humanity (reduced from their state of jaunty and superior aloof flunkeyness, for were they not the Burra Lord Sahib's naukars to whom it was a condescension to serve such as you at all!), was the most ludicrous sight imaginable.

What had happened? The tiger whom I had heard in the grass perceiving how near he was to the edge of his shelter, and being a white-livered cur to boot, had lain skulking in the grass, and seeing his opportunity owing to the unauthorized presence of the lunch-elephant, had sprung between it and the outer pad-elephant and broken back. The lunch-elephant gave at once as we have seen, and with shrill trumpets of alarm turned and fled out of the jungle like a driven rabbit, thus upsetting the two beater elephants nearest to it. The grass was so dense that although I could follow with my rifle muzzle the first springs of the tiger, I could see nothing of it. A sharp order and we turned left, and in our turn did time down that road, waving forward B—— as we approached, as it was necessary to round up the tiger at once if he was not to escape us. Several of the beater elephants came out on to the road and followed us down at a rough, shambling amble, whilst others went down through the grass on the other side of the forest. The line was reformed, and we beat over the old ground again. The tiger was once seen as he slunk forward, the fact being proclaimed by a howl of derision from the nearest mahouts, but that was all. We reached and passed the scene of the exploit of the khits, who were now, by the way, at a safe distance behind, loudly extolling their prowess in face of the Shaitan, who was presently to eat the bullets of the sahibs. No rustle in the thick patch of grass proclaimed that the tiger was there. Nor could he have broken back again at this point.

Turning a slight angle of the road, I came into view of what must now prove the scene of the final tussle, since 'stripes' had refused to face the road to the right, and dared not try and break through the line again. I now saw that the leading howdah had taken up his position in the open, a few yards from where the dense patch of grass at the top of the forest abruptly ended. No. 2 howdah, which was occupied by a girl, daughter of our host, remained upon the road at the corner, commanding both the road in my direction and the top edge of the grass. I closed up within about 30 yards of this howdah, and faced towards the grass, the fourth howdah halting some 40 yards behind me.

This patch of dense grass, which must now contain the tiger, was scarcely 30 yards long by double that broad, and the beaters had just got into it before we had any intimation of the tiger's whereabouts.

A sudden rush, and he charged through the grass to within 20 yards of the girl in the howdah, and was met by a shot, followed rapidly by a second, and he turned and slunk back. Now would come my time, I thought, for it seemed very improbable that such a cur would face the open country in which the leading howdah had taken up his post. The next few minutes were nearly as exciting as any I have lived through, as with finger on trigger I faced the wall of grass not 10 yards away, and expected each second to see a yellow shadow flash out of the jungle towards my elephant.



The tiger charged through the grass.

Very, very slowly the line came on, halting almost at every stride to make sure of not walking over the tiger skulking in a grass tussock.

A second rush in the grass, a half-hearted one, nearer to me this time, but still at the girl's howdah. This time I saw nothing of the beast, and I don't think the girl saw more than a gleam of yellow, at which she fired one barrel. Up to now I had been naturally diffident about firing at what was the girl's tiger, but No. 1 howdah shouted me to fire the moment I saw the brute, and I was quite prepared to do so.

Almost immediately after the second charge I heard a rustle just in front of me. The tiger was evidently slinking down towards the thick patch of grass in which he had broken back once already. This manœuvre was soon spotted, however, and he was sent back by the elephants. It was too late now for that kind of thing. Had he tried the road much earlier in the beat, he had some chance of escaping unscathed, as the shot any of us would have had would have been a very nasty one. Now he would have to face the fire of more than one rifle in all probability—a fitting reward for the cur he undoubtedly was!

As he sprang back on being turned by the elephants, he must have passed within 15 yards of the edge of the grass fronting me, but so thick was it that I could see absolutely nothing at all. The excitement was all the greater, since none of us knew for certain whether the beast was wounded or not. He had never spoken to either of the shots. From his behaviour I had every belief that he was, especially as the fair occupant of No. 2 howdah was a good shot and a fairly cool hand at the game.

A third rush through the grass facing lucky No. 2, and a more determined one this time. He came to the edge of the grass and was met with a shot. I just saw a flickering patch of yellow for an instant as the cur turned for the third time and retreated. So sure had I been of a shot this time that I had all but pulled the trigger at the place I had expected him to occupy an instant later. ‘ Budzat Shaitan,’ muttered my mahout audibly, ‘ you and your grandmother are white-livered women and the offspring of pigs.’

The third charge had failed, and my hopes now went down to zero, and I envied the three men in the howdahs in the line, for it appeared to be a gift for any one of them, unless they walked over him, which was not impossible in that thick stuff. The beating elephants were now closed up so as to touch each other, and I advanced up the road in line with them, so as to give no opening for ‘ stripes ’ to sneak across the road. We went very slowly, halting at each step.

The howdah in the line nearest me was just about in the middle of the grass patch, and its occupant craned over the edge with his eyes piercing the jungle straight below him and finger on trigger. Suddenly, when about 20 yards from the top edge of the grass patch, there was a rustle and a rush—always back. I saw the occupant of this howdah suddenly lean over the side fronting me, point his rifle vertically downwards, and fire both barrels in quick succession.

‘ Habet ! ’ he shouted.

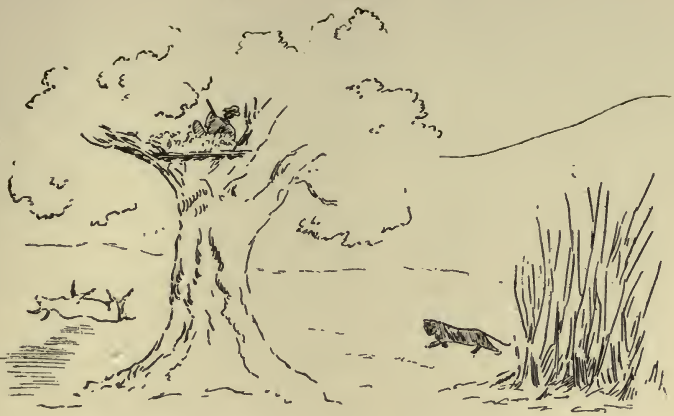
True to his nature, the skulker had endeavoured to lie low in the grass, hoping to be passed over by the line, and he came very near to success when he received his quietus and died the death of a cur. Not once had he shown any real fight ; his three charges, when decided upon, each resulted in retreat, when, had he pushed them home, he might have reached safety on the hill behind us.

An examination showed that one of the bullets of the girl had hit the beast in the head, probably one of the first two fired. F——, who had finished the beast off, had also hit him in the head, braining him on the spot, his other bullet going wide.

So ended a beat which contained a number of lessons to be learnt by those who would—a beat full of the most intense excitement, and yet a beat in which the tiger had died the death of a cur.

A pad elephant was now called up, the tiger's body was enveloped in a net made of stout fibre ropes and the whole then hauled on to the elephant and securely bound to the pad to be taken back to camp.

One could add anecdote on anecdote concerning this fascinating sport, but it is now time to turn and consider the methods by which a less well-filled purse and a less exalted station in life can carry on war against 'stripes.'



CHAPTER II

Tying up and sitting up for tiger—The 'gara' or 'kill'—How to tie up—Native shikari tactics—Government rewards for man-eaters—News of a 'kill'—Beating out the tiger with villagers—Stops—A plucky Kol—Machan-shooting—Fascinating jungle sights—Vultures—The pea-fowl's warning—A tiger appears—Despair—Meet a tiger on the prowl—The Bhisti's adventure—Cattle-lifters—A kill—How to prepare the machan—My first tiger—The cattle-lifter—Cattle-lifting extraordinary—Sit up for the robber—Mosquitoes—The tiger appears—A lost opportunity—When the blood is young—Things incredible.

TYING UP AND SITTING UP FOR TIGER

PERHAPS the most general of all methods employed in the pursuit of tiger throughout the country is to tie out 'kills' (gara), consisting of buffaloes or cows, in the forests or jungles known to be occupied by 'stripes,' and wait till a kill shall enable you to get to work.

This form of securing a much-coveted trophy is very monotonous in a way, since it means that you can do little yourself to assist matters. In many districts, too, tiger have now become so wary and cute that they will pass by a gara tied up without so much as a glance at it; or, more aggravating still, will walk round it and then depart without touching it. Or, most aggravating of all, will kill the beast and then not come near it again.

The gara or 'kill' consists of a buffalo or cow, depending to a great extent on which is most procurable, or in parts of the country upon the religious susceptibilities of the people of the locality.

For the selection of the sites in which to tie up, one must be guided by the local shikari of the neighbourhood, unless one is in the happy position of having a thorough knowledge of the locale, and of the habits of the tigers living in the country. Without this, one is from the outset practically in the hands of the local men, and one often finds that as a result of several weeks' work and the outlay of considerable sums of the coin of the realm one has an empty bag, the tigers being kept to attract other equally simple and deluded sahibs.

I would not be understood to mean that this is invariably the case, and it will not usually be so in areas where tiger are plentiful. Also one thing in favour of the sportsman's now and then having a good time, is that the shikari has to be very careful that he does not inculcate sportsmen with the idea that there is nothing to shoot in his neighbourhood, otherwise his golden harvest will come to a sudden and abrupt end.

The improvement of rifles and the great drop in price of many of the cheaper patterns which the last few years has seen, is another factor in the case. It tempts the shikari to endeavour to keep the tiger, and especially notable tigers, to shoot them himself and obtain the Government reward. I have known instances, many of us will probably be able to quote cases, where the local shikari or shikaris in the beat of a notorious man-eater, have put sahibs off the track and prevented them having any reasonable chance of a shot at the pest who had established a reign of terror over a district, and for whom the large reward of 500 rupees was offered. With the callous indifference of the native to human life they would rather let the weekly toll of human kills go on until they secured the animal and the reward, rather than help the parties of European sportsmen who arrived on the ground prepared to do all they knew to wipe out the noxious pest.

I have often heard men say that Government would be wise to grant the heavy rewards offered for notorious man-eaters to *bona fide* sportsmen only, and not allow native shikaris to claim them. Whilst there is every probability that the man-eating pest would be got rid of at a much earlier date were this done, the shikari would not suffer, as the sahib is ever most generous to his helpers in sporting matters.

When the ‘ kills ’ have been purchased and tied out, the sportsman has nothing to do but sit and twiddle his thumbs or devote his attention to other game in areas remote from the ‘ tie-ups ’ until an animal has been killed. This latter will usually be done at night or in the late evening, and occasionally in the afternoon, and the khubbar will be brought to him in the early morning, the shikari and his satellites, or more probably the latter only, going the round of the tie-ups at dawn every morning.

In the Central Provinces once a kill has taken place the tiger’s pugs are carefully followed up till he is marked down in some patch of grass or forest, the trackers circling round the area to make sure that the tracks only enter, and do not leave the patch. The tiger will remain here throughout the day, slinking out in the evening or after nightfall to feed on the kill. Once the locality of the tiger has been definitely ascertained, a man or two are left to watch, and the rest depart to report the matter and to hastily turn out beaters from the nearest villages. There will be time, as the beat will not be commenced until the sun has got to some height in the sky, and the tiger has taken up his position for the day in some shady

CENTRAL PROVINCES BEATERS AND THEIR CAMP

A COMFORTABLE FOREST REST-HOUSE IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES TIGER COUNTRY

spot. Having decided upon the direction of the beat, ‘stops’ are posted, and the rifle or rifles take up their positions and the beat commences.

It is in all these arrangements that the sportsman who has made a study of the matter, is versed in jungle lore, and is not content to be led by the nose by his shikari, will find plenty of interest and occupation as well.

He will probably know the whole of the ground himself, will choose in consultation with the local men the position of the rifles, and, as important, exactly where the ‘stops’ are to be placed. These ‘stops’ consist of men placed in trees or on the summit of high rocks on the lines by which the tiger may endeavour to leave the beat, and are put there to prevent him going out. The stops require to be men who are not afraid of the sight of the Lord of the Jungles, and who will keep their heads when he appears.

All that is required of them is to tap their tree very gently at intervals, so as to produce sufficient sound to make the tiger turn away from their direction without absolutely frightening him. As soon as the tiger is aware that the beat has commenced, or that there are men about, he will usually try to slip quietly out of the patch by one of the paths he is accustomed to take. Most amusing, but often intensely annoying at the time, are the stories one hears of the behaviour of these stops. Occasionally a mistake will be made about a man chosen for this purpose, and one hears too late that on the appearance of the tiger he has entirely lost his head and has clung to his tree as one stricken with the palsy, with rattling teeth and staring eyeballs, whilst 'stripes' has strolled by beneath and out of the beat. Stops often, however, behave very well, and rise to the occasion when a more than ordinarily determined tiger endeavours to break out of a beat. I saw a man, a Kol in Chota Nagpur, fling first his axe, without which implement the Central Indian aborigines never stir, and then his pagri at a tiger who had no stomach for a long walk through the grass in front of a line of noisy villagers who, armed with village drums, old matchlocks, heavy sticks, and the inevitable kerosene tin, were creating a babel fit to raise the dead. That pagri turned this particular gentleman, who reached the rifles and his end from a ·400 cordite Express of a friend. Mine was the spectator's part on that occasion.

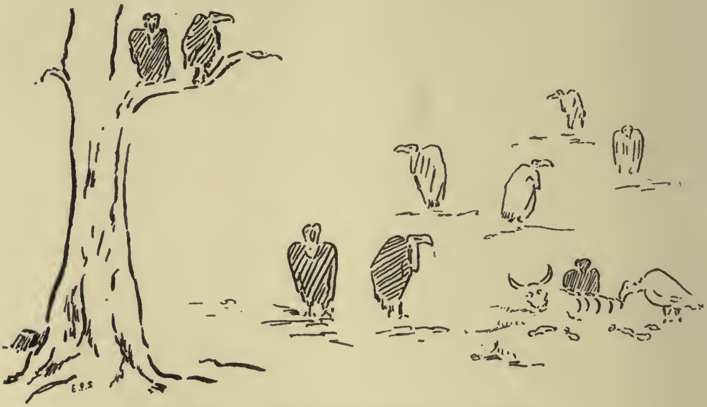
In Northern India the grass is too long to enable men to be used as beaters with safety, or with any chance of success; and therefore if one has not a lordly array of elephants to do the work, such as we have already described, or even one or two to beat up 'stripes' with, one has a machan or platform built in a tree close to the kill and sits up over the latter.

To the tyro, if he is a natural history lover, this procedure is all pleasure, for everything is new to him at this stage of his introduction to the wild sports of India ; and the mere vigil in a forest or area of long grass with the novel sights around him are of such consuming interest that the long hours he may have to sit there are absorbing. The bird-life and insect-life around him will well repay watching, and later, as the sun's rays begin to dip to the horizon, the animal-life will begin to appear. Then, as he may not fire a shot, he will probably see some fine chitul heads or a heavy sambhar pass him by on their way to a favourite grazing-ground ; or a sounder of pig may come out and dig and delve and snort and grunt in front of him in their earnest and patient search for roots. Vultures will be sitting on the surrounding trees eager but afraid to drop down on to the toothsome carcase. Their turn will come when the Lord of the Jungles has filled himself and they will then gorge themselves to repletion and pick every bone clean. Jackals will be seen, grey shadowy shapes, slinking about, but not daring to approach the kill. Men have seen 'spots' himself slink out of a patch of jungle and have a look at the kill he would like, but dare not, steal.

One jumps as a loud 'paon, paon, paon,' away in the forest, cleaves the silence. The tiger is afoot. Pea-fowl, screeching in the evening or at night, generally mean that the Lord of the Jungles is about. We wait patiently, all our senses on the alert.

Suddenly a twittering in a neighbouring tree, and a slight rustle to one's right. Slowly, imperceptibly one turns one's head to see 'stripes' himself walking across to the kill. He stops and looks around, and one can see him scenting the air for anything suspicious.

A movement now and you are lost, and yet one is at such an angle that it is impossible to fire at him.



Vultures gorge themselves to repletion.

How oft does this not occur! After one has taken every precaution to ensure one's being able to bring the rifle to bear in all directions, he comes out behind and spoils all.

The excitement is now intense, and especially will it be so for the tyro—he who has never fired at tiger before—perchance never seen the animal outside of a *Zoo*. He can hear his heart thumping like a sledge-hammer against his chest, and his very breathing appears to him now, in the intense silence, to be like the rushing of a mighty breeze from his lips. Now the tiger has moved forward again. Soon, very soon, he will be broadside on, an easy shot, if one's too palpitating nerves and muscles will but keep still for an instant.

Just before the psychological moment, 'stripes' stops dead as if turned to stone. An instant of mad fright on our part and he turns, and with a 'woof, woof,' in a few bounds is lost to sight in the jungle.

What has happened, we ask ourselves in frenzy! Surely he can't have gone for good!

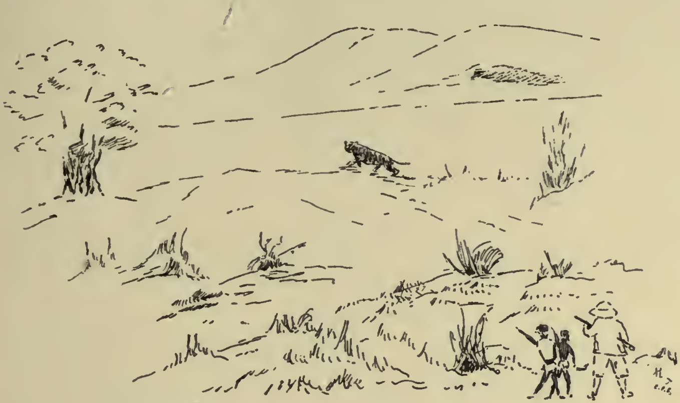
Who knows! He saw or smelt something, or that sixth sense warned him of peril just as we were counting him ours and he has gone. We may as well go too, if we have sense. If we are a tyro we shall sit out long hours in a hopeless wait.

Have you ever accidentally come across a tiger on the prowl in his native jungles without his being aware of your presence? This good fortune befell me recently, and my memory retains a most vivid recollection of the scene.

I went out one evening for a stroll soon after my arrival at a small forest rest-house in the Central Provinces. I had never been in this particular part of the country, and my object was as much to learn something about my neighbourhood as anything else.

I had two baigahs (a local jungle tribe) with me, and we made a tour of the surrounding patches of forest and grass land, on the off-chance of seeing a good sambhar or barasingha stag. We saw several considerable herds of chitul and barasingha, all with stags in them, but none with a head worthy the expenditure of a cartridge. The sun was dropping behind the nearest tree-covered hill-top as we reached an open, billowy space of short coarse grass. We were proceeding in Indian file, and had got half across this when one of the natives touched me on the arm and muttered 'bagh.' Now the word 'bagh' (tiger) is as often as not used by the natives for a leopard and, not infrequently, for any animal seen indistinctly, and which their excited imagination is ever ready to consider to be the animal they most dread to meet in the forest. I consequently turned slowly and rather casually to look in the direction the man pointed to. Judge my amazement and excitement when I saw, about a hundred paces away to my left, a large tiger moving in a direction parallel to the one we were taking, but going the opposite way. Mechanically, I seized the heavy rifle which I fortunately had with me, and cocked both triggers. As I did so the thought flashed through my mind that I could not fire at the beast. The jungle I was in had been already reserved for tiger by two other men who were to arrive at the bungalow that evening, and thus the animal in front of me was taboo. I don't think I ever felt more chagrined in my life than at that moment.

We stood stock still and watched 'stripes.' He came striding along with beautifully long undulating strides, his head held erect, his long, lithe body swinging lightly over the ground beneath the free movements of his powerful legs, whilst his tail swung slowly from side to side. On he came, looking enormous. Now he was directly in front of us, and his head came round. Had he seen us? For a moment my fingers gripped the rifle as in a steel vice, but he had not seen us. I was in khaki, and resembled in colour the surrounding grass, and the light was fading.



A large tiger moving parallel to our direction.

The tiger continued on his way, and we slowly followed him. Why, I know not, save that the sight of him fascinated me. His movements were the very poetry of motion, and as he disappeared into a nullah I sighed my disappointment. The baigahs were wild with excitement. No thought of fear animated them. 'Shoot him, shoot him, sahib!' they urged. 'He takes our cattle weekly, the *shaitan!*' What did they care for shooting rules and the unwritten code of sportsmen? In the old days the sahib shot, or tried to shoot, a tiger on sight. Why not now?

We followed cautiously down the nullah. There were his pugs as large as life and as fresh. 'What luck! What cursed luck!' I kept muttering to myself.

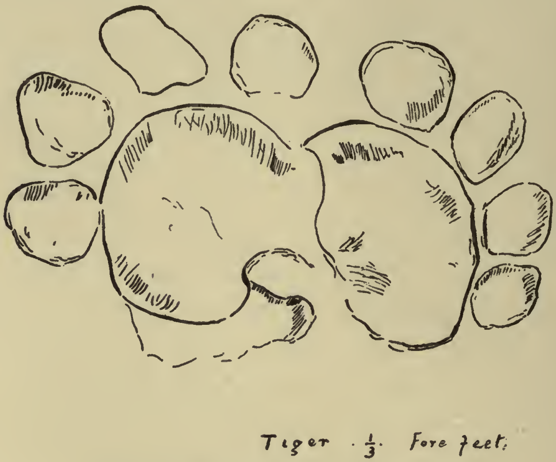
We never saw him again! It was as well, perhaps. Who knows what thoughts were simmering at the back of my brain?

I remember another occasion when I came near to seeing another tiger in his native wilds. A friend and myself were camped one May in a large forest about 100 yards from a small stream. We had been out bison-tracking all day, and had got back to the tents just before sundown. I had just got out of a hot tub when some peafowl set up their 'paon, paon, paon' not far off. 'A tiger somewhere about,' I thought, as I towelled myself. I was partially dressed, when I suddenly heard the most unearthly yell that has ever fallen on my ears. Like unto nothing I knew was it, and yet I never doubted for a moment but that it came from a human voice. The camp was in an uproar at once, and seizing the nearest gun and slipping into a pair of slippers, I rushed out 'The stream, it came from the stream!' I heard an excited servant crying, and I dashed in that direction. There was a nearly full moon sailing over the tree-tops, and by its light I rushed towards the nullah.

When near the bank I descried a tottering form approaching me. I brought the rifle to the ready, but soon dropped it again. It was a man, and turned out to be the bhisti or waterman. Never before or since have I seen a native's face the colour of his. A dull greyish white, terror-stricken countenance gazed out at me as he tottered by on the path to the camp, the only sense left to him apparently being that of direction. I followed him slowly back with one eye behind me. Near the tents we met H—— hurrying towards us, clothed only in an immense bath towel and a pair of slippers, but armed with his heaviest rifle. Patient questioning elicited the fact that the bhisti had not drawn enough water during the daylight to satisfy the cook's wants, and had consequently been sent out in fear and trembling to the river after dark. When in the act of filling his tin a large tiger had walked down the opposite bank to drink in the moonlight within fifteen paces of him.

For several seconds tiger and man gazed into each other's eyes, then, dropping his tin, the wretched man emitted the awful yell we heard, turned, and tottered away—thus placing himself at the mercy of 'stripes.' Luckily the latter was not a man-eater, or the man's fate would have been sealed.

We went down with a couple of lanterns to the edge of the stream and found ample verification of the man's statement, for there, clearly discernible in the moonlight, were the pugs of a large tiger, the water slowly oozing into the two impressions of the fore feet in the sand. Before starting on this second excursion to the stream I took the precaution to exchange my shot gun, loaded with No. 8 cartridges (for that was the weapon I had hurriedly snatched up on leaving the tent!) for a heavy rifle.


Tiger · 1/3 · Fore feet.

There were the pugs of a large tiger.

THE CATTLE-LIFTER

Of course, all tigers are not shot over 'tie-ups'! A very large number probably end their lives as the outcome of a natural kill by themselves. The tiger that takes to cattle-killing, and his numbers are very large in the country, probably meets his end in this manner. As soon as a kill of this kind occurs the villagers will usually (or did so in the old days) send word to the nearest sahib, if there are any in the vicinity.

If the latter has elephants or is in a country where the villagers will turn out to beat up the tiger, he is tracked from the kill to the neighbouring piece of jungle in which he is passing the day, stops are placed, the rifle takes up his position, and the tiger is beaten out.

If, however, the kill is in a part of the country where beating is impossible, either owing to the denseness of the jungle, the absence of elephants, or the impossibility of getting the natives or a sufficient number of natives to beat, there is nothing for it but to sit up over it.

The dead animal, if possible, should be left exactly as it was when the tiger quitted it, and the villagers should not be allowed to walk round it or trample down the grass and jungle and thus inevitably leave behind them man's aroma, a taint of which will effectually prevent the tiger revisiting the kill. The machan will be fixed to the nearest tree. If the kill is in the open and no convenient site for the sportsman to sit up is available, the kill will have to be removed, and this must be done by means of ropes attached to the carcase, and the men fixing and removing ropes should have their feet covered with the skin of an animal, preferably the inner surface of the skin of a newly killed animal.

I shot my first tiger over a kill of this nature. It was down in Berar, where I had proceeded from Simla on tour one July. Two of us had been out in the forest all the morning and got back to breakfast tired and sopping wet about midday. Half-way through breakfast khubbar was brought in that a tiger had killed a buffalo the night before. I could not resist the temptation, though the other man resolutely refused to go on the wild-goose chase, as he called it. And in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred he would have been right. The kill was six miles away, and I was wet through long before I got there. Some three hours did I sit in that machan in the pelting rain, and at last, just as I had given up all hope, the tiger suddenly appeared, walking out of the jungle and round the dead buffalo with his tail in the air like a great cat. He picked up the buffalo, which had not been pegged down as it should have been, in his jaws and before I could do anything carried it into some bushes where he and it were hidden, all save a portion of his head. I spent half an hour of excruciating agony before risking the shot at his head which gave me my first tiger.

The cattle-lifter is undoubtedly a most serious pest to the villager in the area of country he affects, and at times proves a perfect curse. I remember one puja holiday I was visiting a district officer in Hill Tippurah. The day after my arrival word was brought in that a tiger had killed five cows out of a herd on the evening before. In spite of the assurances of the informer, we felt firmly convinced that there must be more than one animal to have killed so many, probably a tigress teaching her cubs how to kill. A party of five of us rode out to the place, some ten miles distant. Sure enough, the village shikari confirmed the report, and said that only one tiger was present, and he a well-known depredator and an old hand at the game. He went lame on one foot, and this enabled his pugs to be easily distinguished. There would be a fine moon half an hour after sunset, and it was agreed that we should sit up till ten, and then ride home. Five machans had been built, but one was said to be of no use, and was occupied by a native. I sat in the same machan as my friend. We tossed for first shot, and I lost. There would not be much for me to do, I surmised. The rains had come to an end, and the sun set in a wild blaze of red glory over the edge of the forest-clad hill to our left, and with its departure arose the most appalling hum from millions of mosquitoes that it has ever been my lot to hear—or feel, for we soon felt them. They must have been in billions, and their hum was like unto the hum of a myriad cicadas in the far-away Himalayan heights. We had been warned of this, a warning which was unnecessary, as we most of us knew what to expect, and had come prepared accordingly. We each had our own special pet preventive, my own being camphor oil, with which I had plentifully smeared my face, neck, hands, and wrists. It is often effective. In our present place nothing would have been, for the insects were voraciously hungry. We had a shocking four hours of it.

The moon rose over the hill-crest, silvering the tops of the trees, and then throwing vivid and uncanny shadows over the ground, and turning areas of tartarean darkness to a beautiful silvery brightness. Our kill was yet in impenetrable darkness, and the hum of the mosquitoes was all that broke the stillness. Half an hour passed or perhaps more, and I leant gently forward. Yes, I could now indistinctly see the kill. I touched my friend. He looked over and shook his head. He wore glasses as he was short-sighted, and told me afterwards that he could at no time see the kill as the light was not strong enough for him. Shortly after a faint snap of a twig caught my ear. I listened intently. Surely that was a faint rustle. I looked at my friend. He did not move.

I leant over, and as soon as my eyes got accustomed to the darkness, there below me I made out the faint, indistinct outline of something lying over a portion of the kill. I nudged my companion. He peered down, looked at me, and peered down again. I was getting excited. I felt sure the tiger was below. There was moon enough now to get a good sight of him just below us. Not remembering my companion's short-sightedness, I could not make out what on earth he was about. Again I nudged him, and put my finger on his rifle. He shook his head. By moving my rifle a few feet I could have got a dead sight on that indistinct shape. But it was not my shot. A few seconds, during which I felt the atmosphere becoming sultry, for I was in a royal rage, and then a couple of soft rustlings in the bushes and dead silence. Whatever it was had gone. Half an hour passed—an hour—and then a rifle-shot, clean and sharp, clove the air. Silence, and then another shot, and all was still. Half an hour—an hour—passed, and then the silence of the forest was broken by a sharp whistle. It was the signal for the elephants.

Soon the sagacious beasts came slowly up, and we slipped on to the pad from the machan. My friend had appeased my wrath at his not firing by saying that he could make out nothing at all on the kill, and yet an inspection showed that the tiger had been there. None of the three othe machans had seen the beast, though one of them had heard him cruising round in the jungle. The shots must have come from the despised fifth machan then—the one occupied by the native. This proved to be the case. The tiger must have gone to the outlying kill when he left ours, and had already commenced to feed before the native fired, and missed him clean with both barrels.

On reaching the village, a whisky and soda and a biscuit all round, and we galloped across country home, going at a pace which only the recklessness of youth and hot blood permits with safety. Two of us sat up the next day over the two most likely kills, but we saw nothing of the tiger, and he never again visited either of the five.

THINGS INCREDIBLE

I had the following tiger yarn from the lips of an old schoolfellow of mine, and it is really too good to be lost.

It relates to a second schoolfellow, the three of us having been contemporaries, and all in the Services in India.

The man in question, or youth as he was then, had arrived in Bombay in November to join the Civil Service. He was posted to an up-country station, and went out with a party a few weeks later for the usual Christmas shoot.

He being the newly joined youngster and griffin of the party, was naturally not looked upon as a great acquisition from the keen shikari's point of view. The more so, that his only weapon consisted of a Service Martini-Henry rifle, relic of his Oxford volunteering days.

The party intended having a series of hanks, or beats, for tiger, the rifles taking up their positions in a line of machans.

The totally inadequately armed griffin was very naturally relegated to the worst, and safest from the parties' point of view, of the positions in the first beat, with strict orders to fire at nothing but tiger—this being the general order to the line.

The beat started, and all remained deadly silent in the line of machans as the din of the beaters gradually approached.

Suddenly a shot was heard from the direction of the obscure corner where our griffin was posted, rapidly followed by another. Muttered ejaculations from the younger men, and good solid hard swearing from the more senior members of the party, followed each shot—swearing which grew heartier and more fervent as a perfect fusillade from the corner synchronised with the near approach of the coolies and end of the beat. The fact that each sportsman had to remain at his post and swear in silence under his breath, only increased the bottled-up wrath.

At the end of the beat, a general and hurried move was made in the direction of the despised corner occupied by the luckless griffin. There sat the newly joined, still in his machan and apparently wrapped and wreathed in a huge smile of utter content. As each angry man came up, a storm of vituperation was poured upon his devoted head, increasing in volume as each excited shikari got within hearing.

The smile gradually faded, and the youth stared in amazement at the angry sportsmen gesticulating below, and then showed signs of evident confusion at this unexpected universal condemnation.

As soon as he could make himself heard above the wrathful babel and in reply to a more direct question from a senior officer of, 'What the d—l do you mean, sir, spoiling the whole shoot by your blank, blank fusillade?' he blurted out, 'I only got three. How many did you get?'

'Three *what*, sir,' yelled the peppery old senior.

'Tigers of course, sir,' meekly answered the youngster, now seriously alarmed at the demeanour of his superior officer. 'You said I was to only fire at tigers. They are down there in the grass.'

A silence of consternation followed this astounding statement, and a general edging off towards the shelter of neighbouring trees took place amongst the overheated sportsmen. When safer positions had been taken up, a short parley ensued. As a result, a couple of elephants put into the grass soon disclosed a fine full-grown tigress and two nearly full-grown youngsters lying dead close by—all bearing the despised Martini-Henry bullets in them!

CHAPTER III

Leopard or panther—Most crafty of the cat tribe—Habits—Disliked by the villager—The subaltern's hope—Distribution—Size of leopards—Tying up for leopard—Craftiness in a beat—Abundance of leopards—Shooting 'spots' with No. 6—Leopards and small-bore rifles—Sitting up for the pard—A night adventure—Contrariness of the goat—An afternoon *rencontre*—The pard in his natural surroundings.

LEOPARD OR PANTHER

AMONGST the most crafty of the jungle beasts is the leopard or panther (*Felis pardus*), the 'pard' or 'spots' of the sportsman.

He is probably more intensely disliked by the petty villager than even his more lordly companion the tiger, since, instead of robbing and killing on the grand scale, he is given to petty pilfering, and carries off their goats, dogs, and even young babies in the most cool, exasperating, and sly fashion.

The leopard can by no means be considered a denizen of the big jungles, since he is always to be found on the outskirts of civilization, lying up in forest or grassy tracts in the vicinity of villages, and coming out in the evening to prowl round the village environs on the look out for the titbits he is so fond of.

His colouring of fulvous yellow, with the black ringed rosette markings all over the body and tail, is particularly adapted to concealment, since it so closely resembles his environment, and combined with his slinking, skulking habits, enables him to carry on his pilfering depredations on the villager's possessions in a markedly successful manner. With all their cleverness and ingenuity in finesse, to call it by no stronger term, the villager has not yet discovered how to successfully bring 'spots' to book. The latter will lie up in a bush but a fraction the size of himself, and crouch so low and keep so still as to deceive and escape even the keen sight of the jungle-bred villager.

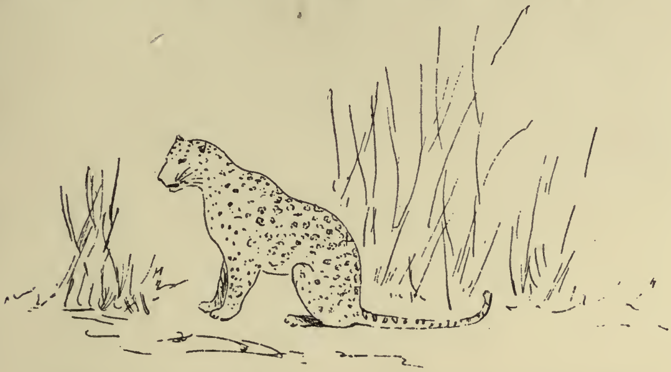
That he should in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred give us the go-by is therefore scarcely to be wondered at.

His craft and guile extends not merely to securing his daily meal. It is equally expended and brought into play for his own self-preservation and protection.

I have often pondered and meditated over this animal, and endeavoured to form some estimate of his individual character as seen in the light of the numerous anecdotes one constantly hears about him in India, and from one's own personal experiences. One cannot help arriving at the opinion that in the course of centuries of contact perhaps the animal has assimilated some of the experience and ways of thought and, shall we add, the craft and guile of man himself : man as represented by the Indian villagers living in the neighbourhood of the wilder tracts of the country, who will necessarily have a close acquaintance with the habits of the animals living in their vicinity. In the centuries during which the villager and panther have been living side by side, is it absurd to conjecture that the animal has absorbed a considerable amount of man's guile and craft, or has gradually opposed to it a greater cunning? It is not usual for a leopard to be caught in a trap or to succumb to poisoned baits. And yet how often have attempts been made to induce him to enter the one or eat the other !

His curiosity or craftiness, whichever it may be due to, will induce him to carefully inspect every device set out for the purpose of his capture, but his knowledge of man and his natural cunning will lead him to do so from a safe distance, and with the utmost circumspection, and he will then continue on his way with probably a chuckle of delight, or perhaps a snort of disgust that man should still think so badly of his powers as to imagine he would be taken in by *that!*

Even 'spots' has his uses, however; for does he not form a source of perennial delight and hope to every subaltern in the country? Do not they in their hundreds sit up for him in all sorts of weather, in all sorts of curious situations, the luckless, but at the same time cute, goat tied to a stake below them, their rifle on their knees, and high hope in their hearts that this time at least success will be theirs, and that the pard will come out to be shot; whilst he, the pard, sits on his haunches at the edge of the jungle, 150 yards or so away, cleans his face with his paw, and looks at the whole of the preparations with an amused grin of appreciation and pity for the poor deluded fool in the tree!



Whilst 'spots' sits on his haunches at the edge of the jungle.

The leopard is common throughout India,

and appears to be more particularly partial to the rocky and hilly portions of the country. There are considered to be two varieties: the panther, which is the larger, the average length of which may be taken at 7 feet; and the smaller one, the leopard, the average length of which is about 6 feet 4 inches. The animal may be said to range from 5–8 feet in length, the average height at the shoulder being about 2 feet. The largest leopard recorded measured 8 feet 5½ inches, shot by Captain A. G. Arbuthnot (*The Sportsman's Book for India*), whilst H.H. the Maharaja of Cooch Behar killed one measuring 8 feet 4 inches (*The Asian*).

Anything over 7 feet 6 inches would be nowadays considered a big leopard.

The period of gestation is fifteen weeks, the breeding time being February and March, whilst the cubs number from two to four. The animal takes about three years to reach full growth.

I do not know whether 'spots' exhibits more craft and skill in approaching a goat tied up as a bait for him—for on occasions his greed and longing for the appetising morsel overcomes his natural sagacity and cunning, and he makes the one irretrievable mistake—or in escaping from a beat without offering his person to a shot from one of the posted rifles. Certainly in a beat he is little short of marvellous. Almost might one say will he hide under a leaf or a tiny wisp of grass. I have—many shikari men will have—stared fixedly *at*, and *on to*, a leopard for a considerable time without seeing him at all, and without in any way being able to outline his form. Only a slight movement, probably of the eye, or ear has framed my eye to a portion of him, and has enabled me to gradually define him. And even at that he will be lost again if one takes an eye off him.

Given such a marvellous similarity in his colour and markings to his natural environment, combined with a wonderful lithe, crouching and absolutely silent method of progression, with perhaps some little understood instinct for locating danger, and it is not difficult to understand how so many driven leopards get safely away, passing close to the rifles in the most perfect safety.

It was only the other day that a couple of us had been beating for sambhar and chitul up in the Dun jungles. The afternoon was drawing to a close, as we came to the end of a long beat in rather heavy jungle. But a narrow strip of forest and tall grass separated us from a broad stony river-bed. The moment the coolies emerged on the line, we made hurriedly for the river-bed to take up our last stand of the day. Quick as we were, we were not quick enough ! As we emerged into the *rao* and looked up stream, there, some 150 or 200 yards ahead, was a leopard making off up it. He had crossed out of the last beat unseen, had not waited in the last bit of jungle which was now to be beaten, but had gone straight through it and got well out of harm's way.

Are leopards becoming scarcer or more numerous in the country ? It is a question I have often heard mooted, and the answers one hears are always directly antagonistic to one another. My own opinion, an opinion held by many, I believe, is that the 'pard' is just as numerous as heretofore, but that he now does not usually hang about civil stations or military cantonments to the extent he formerly did. He has learnt, as most other animals are learning, the nature and power of the modern rifle, and the fact that it is more numerous in the vicinity of the abodes of the sahibs. In stations where formerly it was quite a common occurrence to shoot leopards *in the station*, where they prowled about in the hopes of taking off that greatest delicacy, the white dog of the sahib, you will find them nowadays only as a rare occurrence, and then their cunning is something 'wicked' from the point of view of their would-be slayer.

The other day it had been noticed that a leopard had been prowling about a house, with the obvious hope of sooner or later getting a dog. Why the dog is such an idiot as to dash out and bark at a leopard, as they all invariably will, when one would think that instinct ought to tell it of its danger, I do not know. It is doubtless the results of civilization acting on the animal intelligence, and causing it to lose what man has so hopelessly lost, the finer instincts and senses of the wild animals. My friend having received khubbar of 'spots'' nightly performances, had a bed put on to the flat roof of his house, and spent a week of brilliant moonlight nights sitting up for the sly cat. Needless to say, he never saw a trace of him. Knowing the house, I often wonder whether friend pard sat in the shadow of a bamboo clump on the edge of a nullah situated about 40 yards from the building, and from that safe vantage-point surveyed my friend's form silhouetted against the sky up above him.

Leopards are, of course, often shot in tiger beats, whether from the howdah, machan, or on foot, as should they be within the beaten area they must either try and sneak out at the side, quit it in front, or lie dogo, which is a favourite trick of theirs, and let the beat pass over them. Any one of these proceedings they often accomplish with safety.

I suppose many a leopard is lost in this way, often through the carelessness or laziness of the beaters. When men are employed to beat, the most stringent orders should be issued that no bush or tussock of grass is to be passed without either being beaten with a stick or having stones or clods of earth thrown into it. In order to ensure the beaters doing this, it is always advisable to station at intervals in the line orderlies or peons, or men who can be trusted to see these orders enforced.

I remember seeing this method of beating carried out with the most perfect precision and success during a Christmas shoot in Eastern Bengal. We were out for what we could get, the main idea being sambhar, barking deer, and jungle-fowl (murghis), with pig if one cared to shoot them, which I did not. My host was a perfect shot, and one of the coolest hands I have met. I had knocked over a sambhar, he a pig or two, and we each had a few birds. The beat was nearing its close, and as I exchanged the rifle for the shot-gun, I glanced up the line to where my friend was stationed.

As I looked, up went his weapon. Before I heard the report I saw him step sharply back and fire again rapidly at what looked to me to be a dark shadow. Then I saw something black drop at his feet, and his hand went back for his other weapon, and he covered it and fired again. The rifle this time, I remember thinking, but I had not a notion what the animal was. The beat ended, I saw my friend wave to me; I went up, and there lay a fine leopard, and he had killed it with No. 6. As luck would have it, my friend had his shot-gun in his hand when, without a sound, a fine leopard walked out on to the ride within fifteen paces of him. He fired without hesitation, and as the animal rose in its spring at him he dropped it with the second barrel, which went into him with all the force of a bullet.

Perhaps the most dangerous weapon to use against a leopard is one of the small-bore cordite rifles, dangerous to the owner I mean, not to the animal. More so-called tiger and leopard accidents have probably happened in recent times from the use of the small-bore rifles on dangerous game than from any other cause. The small-bore has no power to ‘ stop ’ a charge of a tiger, leopard, or bear, and though the animal may be mortally wounded, he will get home and maul you before he dies if you are pinning your faith to one of these weapons and are out on foot.

This is a well-known fact amongst shikari men. Most own up to its truth, and yet most startling are the incidents one personally comes across, hears of, or reads of in the papers. The most experienced and oldest of shikaris, men who have shot India's jungles for thirty years or more, will fire at a leopard in a beat, wound him, and then get mauled, or get some one else mauled, which is worse, just because they could not resist the hope and off-chance of putting their bullet through the brain.

And it should be ever borne in mind that the wounds made by the tiger and leopard are most dangerous ones, owing to the animals being meat-eaters and their teeth leaving in the wounds a foul poison. Lucky is the man who does not lose an arm, leg, or his life once he has had a hand-to-hand tussle with one of the large cats.

'Spots' is most often shot over a tied-up living bait, and the ones most usually used are the village *pi* dog or the goat, the latter most commonly. The procedure is to have a *machan* built in some suitable position in the track of the nightly prowlings of the animal, tie up a goat below, and then take up your position in the machan and wait.

As leopards often appear early in the evening or late afternoon, one has to take up one's position by three o'clock or so. The idea of the goat is that once he is tied up alone he will bleat for the rest of the herd, and so attract the leopard to the spot. When the goat acts in the manner he is expected to, the leopard is often attracted as desired. 'Spots' being attracted and seeing the goat, and 'spots' advancing to make him his prey, are two very different affairs, however.

One has often had one's hopes aroused by actually seeing the leopard leave the jungle for the open, more or less ostentatiously advance rapidly to a patch of grass and then disappear from view. One waits with muscles braced and eye intent on the grass patch for minutes, and one begins to think hours. Suddenly a movement, very slight, attracts the eye on the left; one slowly, imperceptibly turns the head. Are there two leopards ? One could swear the one in the grass patch is still there. He could not have left, and yet where does this other one come from ? Now the latter advances, gliding over the ground ; stops, turns to the right, and disappears into some bushes. We sit as silent as a rock, and watch the grass patch in front since the second leopard is now behind us. Half an hour passes, and we are cramped and stiff with silent watching.

A movement on the right. There is the leopard, about 60 yards off now, and advancing. Fifty, forty, thirty. He crouches flat on his stomach and gathers himself for the last rush. Suddenly—*woof*. He is about, and in a few beautiful undulating bounds like a streak is in the jungle. Did he see us really, or has he been playing with us for the last two or three hours ? One has often wondered.

It is monotonous work, this sitting over goats for panther. Interesting and exciting for the tyro, I will admit, and most useful, since machan work, when one is new to the jungle and jungle conditions and life, must prove an aid in training the eye to notice jungle objects, and absorb and take in without knowing why the relative colouring and distances and shades and play of light which are all so new and difficult to acquire by the town-bred eye.

But after the first few years, and when one has assimilated all the pleasure that 'sitting up' work can give one, it becomes a tedious method of sport.

How oft does it end in a mere weariness of the flesh! To cite one of numerous occasions.

During a jungle-fowl beat one day we got khubbar of a panther which was committing considerable depredations amongst the goats and dogs of a certain village. The doctor and self promised to go out and sit up for him during the following week, when there would be a moon. The village was some 8 miles out, at the top of a pass in the Siwaliks. We took a tea-basket, drove out, had tea, tossed for the two machans, situated about a mile apart, and took up our places. My machan was a couple of hundred yards from the village, perched in a small tree in the stony river-bed.

My goat, provided with a large supply of food by his late and future owner, should he be left unnoticed by the leopard, sat down soon after I took possession of my machan and began to feed in a leisurely, contented sort of fashion. I stood it for an hour or so, and then commenced to lose my temper. I had paid for this goat to bleat lustily, while he was quietly enjoying himself. The moon was only just rising, and so I dared not make a noise, as the leopard might be anywhere close for all I knew. I spent the next hour in endeavouring to the best of my ability to make that goat yell, and all without success.

Once he raised my hopes by a plaintive bleat, but he took good care to keep it very plaintive.

We had agreed to sit until 9-30 and then give it up. That meant nearly five hours in that machan in company with a silent goat. I threw everything I had on me at the brute, without avail.

Punctually to the minute I crawled down from my very cold perch, all my extremities being numbed. The goat met me with a friendly bleat of welcome and stood up ready to be taken home. Almost would I have said that the animal was 'in it,' with the villager and the panther, and that the whole was a put up thing!

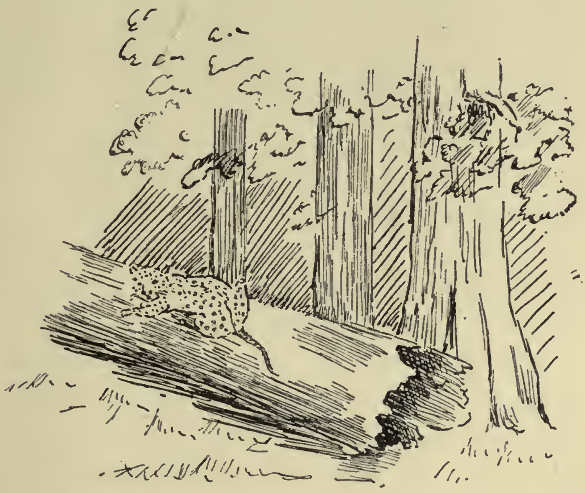
Leaving the goat at the village, I went down the road, and soon saw a dark figure approaching, cursing volubly. 'Twas the doctor and his goat! The latter, tied with a piece of rope, was being dragged along bleating and most reluctant by the doctor, who was in a vile temper. His goat apparently had been picketed amongst some succulent grass on a fire-line in the forest, and had not once opened its mouth until it was hurried from its tempting feeding-ground by the enraged doctor.

Have you ever had the luck to watch a leopard *au naturel* in the jungle without his being aware that you *are* watching him? Of course, the only way to see any wild animal is to see him without his knowing you are watching him. Once he knows this, you no longer see the real animal as he is.

Once I had the luck to see a leopard on his own in the jungle. I was on an elephant in a sál forest in the Terai, and had no rifle or gun with me. I was on my way back to Dehra, my head-quarters, from a long tour in Burma, and had taken a part of Philibhit and Kumaun on my way back. Commissariat and rifle and cartridge arrangements had gone wrong, which accounted for my weaponless condition. Although I probably lost, owing to this state of affairs, a fine skin, I cannot regret it, since I enjoyed an experience I should never have had had a rifle been in my hand, and my sole thought been where to place a bullet.

The elephant was moving slowly along through a fine piece of high tree forest with but a scanty low undergrowth below it. Suddenly he halted at a touch from the mahout's knee, and the latter looked fixedly at an object ahead.

I followed the direction of his eye, but could see nothing. Again I glanced at him, and had another try. But carefully as I searched the chequered, sunlit floor of the forest in front of me, I could see nothing worthy of the mahout's suppressed excitement. Suddenly I felt a movement behind me. The Gurkha orderly had seen something, and was obviously muttering and breathing almost audible curses. The mahout silently raised his arm close to his body and pointed with one finger, the hand held close to his breast. I leant cautiously down and followed the direction indicated. The finger appeared to point directly at a fallen tree trunk some 40 yards ahead, which I had already noticed. The trunk was lying pointing in the direction we were going, some fallen monarch of the last monsoon gale, and was in shade with a chequer of sunlight along its bole. Again I looked at it most closely. Surely something moved—something indistinct and dark and black. Suddenly I saw it. The whole thing leaped to my eye, and I realized that I was gazing at a fine large leopard stretched at length along the bole of the tree, tail towards us, and head turned watching the elephant. Not a trace of fear was there about



A large leopard stretched at length along the tree.

him. Only curiosity to see an elephant in a spot where he had not expected to see one, for this locality was rarely visited by wild elephants, and then only in the rains.

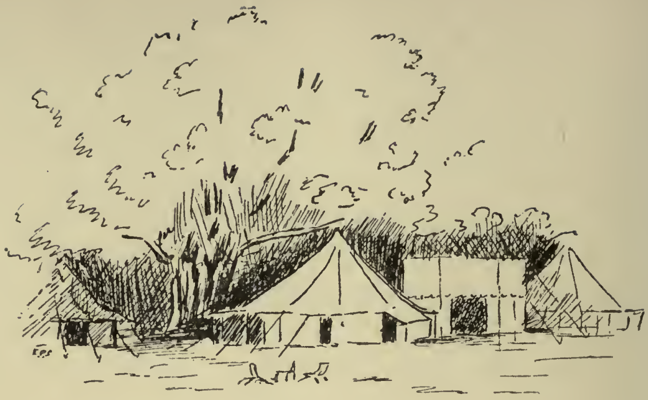
My first feeling was one of wild disappointment that I had not a rifle with me. As he lay there he offered the easiest of marks. As I watched him, however, the feeling gave way to one of pleasure at thus having the opportunity of studying the animal in its natural habitat, and acting in a perfectly natural manner. He had not seen us on the elephant, and it was very doubtful that he would, provided we remained absolutely still, as neither tiger nor leopard nor, in fact, many of the jungle denizens look far up, and an elephant's back appears to be beyond the range of their ken.

Having taken in to the full the beauty of the lithe cat lying at length on the bole, for all the world like some cat on the hearthrug in one's house, I motioned to the mahout to move slowly forward. This he did. When we were within about twenty-five paces the leopard got up, stretched himself lazily, and sprang lightly down from the trunk, glanced round at the elephant again, and slowly trotted off in front of us. We moved very slowly forward in the same direction. Every now and then 'spots' stopped and half turned to look at the elephant, and then trotted on, for all the world like a kitten in a garden.

We went on in this fashion for some 200 yards or more, and then the animal suddenly disappeared. When we arrived at the spot we saw that there was a slight drop into a small nullah. Going down this, we looked up the ravine, and there, not 30 yards away, was our friend the leopard again, sitting on his haunches, licking his paw and cleaning his face. The elephant halted, and I watched him with great interest. I could scarcely have credited the fact had I not seen it myself, that a leopard would have spent so many minutes so close to three men and not have realized their proximity, even though they were upon an elephant.

That leopard spent some five minutes in his ablutions, now and then stopping to cast a glance at the elephant. Then with a final stare he turned round and trotted off up the ravine, and disappeared round a corner higher up.

We continued on our way, I well content that I had not had a rifle with me.



CHAPTER IV

Bear—Habits—An amusing incident—Bear tracks—Size and weight—Where to find bear—His food—Behaviour when roused—How to shoot bear—Beating—Machan work—My first beat for bear—Kols and Santals—Blank beats—Go out after bear again—The Raja and his subjects—See and miss my first bear—Points to be remembered—Other ways of getting bear.

BEAR

PERHAPS some of the most amusing experiences and incidents one meets with whilst shikaring in India occur during encounters with bear. The appearance of the animal himself has something grotesque and bizarre about it. His small head, pointed muzzle, little eyes, and long, shaggy-haired, bulky body give him a comic appearance. Also, when frightened or intensely savage, he has a habit of rising on his hind-legs as he nears his foe, which is apt to exert a quite unwished-for influence on one's risible faculties, shaking the aim which it is of importance should be true and steady at such a moment.

Intensely ludicrous are some of the stories of encounters with bear one has heard of at first hand, or gone through oneself. I suppose no one who has been out after the animal is without some funny personal experiences.

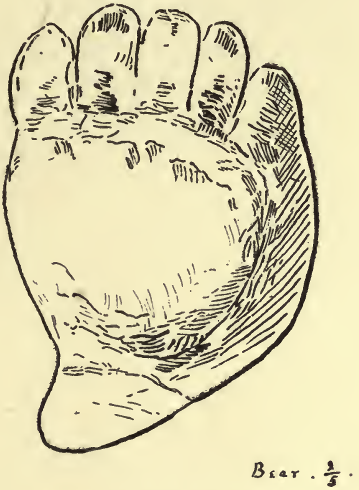
At the same time, it must be borne in mind that a bear is not an animal who can be played with, nor one to be approached in an over-confident spirit. In any part of the country where bears are prevalent, it will only be necessary to go into a village and take a look at a number of villagers to see traces, the results of the none too soft embraces, of the bears of the neighbourhood.

A bear is a surly, sulky, and most obstinate animal, and is always unwilling to move off the road or path he is taking for anything living under the sun—not even man himself. The consequence is that when he suddenly comes face to face with a villager on one of the little footpaths which run from village to village, through forest or jungle, he more often than not at once gets up on to his hind-legs and goes for the man. Unless the latter is armed the result usually turns out badly for him, as even if he escape with his life it will be at the expense of a terrible mauling. It is not an uncommon sight in the jungle villages to see a man or woman with one side of the face deeply scarred and withered from the too friendly embraces of Bruin. In this way the animal is a nuisance to a village, over and above the damage he does to their crops, such as the sweet succulent mahwa (*Bassia latifolia*), maize, etc.

A rather laughable incident of this nature took place a few years ago in the Darjiling Himalaya. A young planter was riding back home in the late evening along a six-foot mountain-path. Coming sharply round a corner he almost ran into a bear. Bruin, resenting the intruders and the disturbance caused by the clatter of the pony's hoofs, at once got on to his hind-legs and, going blindly for the pony, shoved the terrified animal off the road down the khud side. Luckily for the youngster the drop was not sheer, but he and the pony rolled some 50 feet or so down the hill-side before they fetched up. No damage was done to either, and the pony was safely got up again. The youngster, needless to state, was furious, the more so when an inspection of the bear's tracks next morning showed that Bruin had quietly strolled on his way after the episode. That hot-blooded and irascible young Scotsman, with beauty gone (for one side of his face was scarred as if a rake had been drawn across it) and chaffed out of his life at every turn, spent the next fortnight roaming the hill-side, breathing fire and brimstone against all the tribe. His acquaintance was, however, much too wary to accord him a second interview!

There is no mistaking the tracks of a bear once you have seen them, as the animal walks on the soles of his feet. I show the track of one foot here.

The common black bear of the plains of India, the sloth or Indian bear (*Melursus ursinus*), which is the only bear we shall consider here, is common throughout the country, from the Himalaya southwards down into Ceylon. It is to be found chiefly in the rocky and hilly parts of the country, and is most numerous in the wilder and jungle-covered tracts.



Track of a bear.

The sloth bear has rather a handsome skin of long black hair, with a white muzzle and claws and a white horseshoe mark on the chest. This latter, by the way, is the place to aim at should a bear stand up to close with you.

Burke, in the *Indian Field Shikar Book,* quotes the largest bear he has record of as 7 feet 1 inch in length, with a girth of 4 feet 4¾ inches. He gives the average measurements as follows : head and body from 4 feet 6 inches to 5 feet 8 inches ; tail, 4 to 5 inches without hair ; height at shoulder, 2 feet 2 inches to 2 feet 9 inches ; weight, 170 to nearly 800 lbs.

If you want to find Bruin at home you must repair to the nearest rocky hills in your neighbourhood, where, in the daytime, you will probably find him in the recesses of some dark cave entered by a tunnel-like black opening in the rock, or by some cliff or fissure. These caves often have more than one entrance, so that it is necessary to exercise some caution and circumspection if you do not want your quarry to escape you. It is here that the mother brings up her young, which generally number two, and are born in December or January, the period of gestation being from six to seven months. The young ones are blind for the first three weeks after birth.

The sloth bear does not hibernate in the winter months. He is nocturnal in his habits, issuing from his cave retreat in the late evening and returning to it at the earliest dawn. He is a clumsy and awkward mover, especially when climbing, but he is marvellously fast down a rocky hillside when being beaten out, and can move rapidly over rocky slopes covered with dead crackly leaves in a wonderfully silent fashion.

As all know who have ever visited a Zoo, Bruin is very partial to sweets, and this sweet tooth of his causes the villager considerable worry and loss. Any sweet sugar crop that the village may raise will be taken toll of by the bears of the neighbourhood, and owing to their obstinate and irascible dispositions they are very naturally greatly feared by the villager, a fact they appear to be perfectly well aware of.

If I were to be asked, I should say that any form of sweet article, such as the sweet fruits of forest trees and shrubs, any sweet crop cultivated by the villager, such as sugar-cane, maize, etc., honey and many kinds of insects, form the staple food of the sloth bear. Amongst insects the white ant or termite stands out as a favourite dish. Bruin digs these latter out of the ant heaps, his remarkable powers of inhaling and propelling air enabling him to suck up the tiny termites from their galleries. He is also partial to the juice of sweet barked trees, and will often girdle and kill a tree by scratching off the bark with his powerful claws to get at the sweet green succulent bast layer on the inside.

On the whole, the animal is not difficult to approach, provided one remembers to keep the wind blowing from his direction to your own, since his powers of sight are poor, as also those of hearing. His one good sense is that of smell, which is acute.

Whether the bear is timid or brave I will leave to the individual experiences of sportsmen to decide for themselves. Bruin behaves in such very different fashions on different occasions that for the life of me I would not like to set down here an opinion on his character in this respect; for in many cases it would certainly be an aspersion to call him a coward.

I fancy, to a very considerable extent, his actions and attitude depend largely upon the mood in which one comes across him. The meekest and most timid man when irritated and annoyed shows moments of unexpected bravery, and Bruin, so far as my experience goes, is very often irritated and annoyed. Such a little thing puts him out!

For instance, as we have seen, he does not like being suddenly met on a path and asked to get out of the way; nor is he partial to being hooted at and forced to take a different road home in the morning to his accustomed one (after all, many of us are like this ourselves!); and he likes very much less being disturbed by crackers and squibs during his midday siesta *chez lui*.

I have no doubt that on the whole he is a more or less peaceably inclined, sedate old gentleman if allowed to have things his own way, but when one is shikaring him he is not exactly having things as he likes, and that probably accounts for his irascibility of temper.

The two most ordinary ways of getting bear are either to beat them out of their rocky homes in the daytime, or to sit up near the caves before daybreak to get a shot as Bruin is returning home from his nightly forays, or in the afternoon in the hope that he will leave his retreat before dark.

To me these latter are the most fascinating methods of tackling him. There is always the off-chance of a close tussle, and whilst waiting silently in one's stand there is usually an interesting amount of small life to study if one keeps absolutely still.

Beating is often had recourse to in Central India, and if a succession of beats over rocky hills can be arranged for, a very jolly day can be passed, and one not unlikely to be full of incident if one is on foot and not safely ensconced in a machan in a tree.

I remember the very first beat I took part in in India was for bear (with a possible tiger), and great was my excitement at the thought that I was at last to see one at least of the more dangerous animals of the Indian fauna.

A party of five of us left the station soon after dawn one morning early in March, and rode and drove out some 16 miles, finishing the remaining 4 miles on an elephant. On arriving at the meeting-place we found about one hundred villagers collected, but that was all. We required some four hundred, and so I, as the griffin, was told off to inspect the commissariat whilst our senior interviewed the elders of the village as to the cause of the delay.

After the usual heated discussion and protestations had taken place, we sat down in the grateful shade and made a good breakfast. By the end a considerable portion of the stipulated number of men had arrived, and having tossed for machans, we took up our positions. I can remember now as fresh as if it were yesterday, the feelings which animated me as I climbed into No. 2 machan, situated some 25 feet up in a small tree. I could scarcely believe that at last I was to fulfil an ambition of my boyhood and really occupy a machan, and have the luck to shoot something big.

Having loaded up, I waited, quaking with eagerness. A low hill clothed with scattered scrub jungle and small trees faced me. Half-way up, just in front of my position, a mass of rocks and caves were situated. These I thought might contain anything. Suddenly a distant sound—the beat had commenced. The noise grew louder and louder, and at last I spied some tiny figures up against the skyline. They were the beaters!

Down they came, springing from rock to rock

THE COMMON BLACK OR SLOTH BEAR OF THE PLAINS

A BEAUTIFUL SHOOTING COUNTRY IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCES

and boulder to boulder with the agility of mountain goats. As they came on they struck the trunks of the trees with their small axes, or flogged the dense, thorny thickets. Kols and Santals these men consisted of, merry fellows who jested and joked and laughed as they came forward. Deadly with the bow and arrow or their little axes are these jungle men, as many a hare or small mammal getting up in these beats has found to its cost. Their little axe they can throw with an incredibly unerring dexterity worthy of Cooper's Red Indians.

Any trivial incident was enough to amuse the beaters in front of me, and to provoke a roar of laughter. The whole idea of a beat to them was pure pleasure. Down they came. Now they had reached the caves. Volleys of stones and curses were hurled into the cave openings, but to my intense chagrin nothing save two owls emerged, and the beat ended blank!

The next beat was about 1½ miles away, and we climbed on to the elephant to take us there. On arriving at our destination, we found two machans crowning the crest of a low-topped hill, which formed the outlying spur from a much higher range, the others being placed down its flank. The idea was, I understood, to beat out some caves on the higher hill and drive the bears past the machans situated from top to bottom of the lower spur. My lot gave me the uppermost machan. It consisted of a few scanty sticks in a low tree, and I spent the next two hours perched in the fork of the tree about 9 feet from the ground in the hot afternoon sun. Long before the ordeal was over I had come to the conclusion that machan shooting was awful rot, and that an afternoon March sun in Chota Nagpur was a thing to be respected.

The sum total of that beat was two pea-fowl seen! We had then over 20 miles to get back to the station before dinner could be partaken of!

So ended my first day's beating in India, and looking back in the light of some considerable experience, it is not difficult to put one's finger on the reasons for its total failure.

We had gone out solely on some khubbar which was subsequently found to have no foundation save that of native rumour and gossip. Once upon a time, in the memory of prehistoric man, there had been bear, or a bear, in the hills we had beaten, and it was on this handed-down tradition that we had gone out. One might just as well take an 8-bore rifle, sit in a London park, and expect a rhinoceros to come out of the nearest rhododendron clump!

The next attempt to meet Bruin, at which I was present, was more successful.

A few weeks after the fiasco above related, four of us set out one afternoon to drive and ride to a small native state situated some 30 miles away on the borders of the district. We had had one or two showers of rain, the forerunners of the monsoon, and the air was wonderfully cool, after our recent experiences in the station of 117° in the shade!

We were all in high spirits at getting away from the station again out to camp, and the last dak, which we all rode, was a glorious one, the road taking us out of the wide plain through wild and rugged rocky hills which had a most 'bearish' look about them. Of vegetation they were innocent. Black and dark and forbidding, they stood out against the flaring, flaming red of the sunset in the west, whilst to the east, blue and purple in the distance, lay a long mountain crest known as the Golden Range, at the time unpleasantly connected in people's minds with the Bengal Gold and Silver Bubble.

Oh, the sunsets of the East! Can skill with pen or brush ever pourtray them in anything like their wonderful intensity? Ephemeral they, for as one strives with strained and fixed gaze to take in all their beauty, lo! they change and melt, soften and disappear, and leave us with cold greys or blues or blacks.

We reached camp at 7 p.m., and were a merry party at dinner that night. The next morning an early start was made for the second camp, which had been pitched by our hosts, the tents being reached at 9 a.m. Finding we had some two hours to spare two of us went to a neighbouring tank where we were told duck were in abundance. The duck proved to be cotton-teal, and these and some green pigeon kept us at work for an hour, and enabled us to provide a change from the everlasting murghi of the khansammah. We were recalled at the end of this period, and started off on elephants for the hills to be beaten, which were situated some 4 miles away.

The scene round the tents, which was fully displayed to my wondering and unaccustomed eyes from the top of the elephant, simply beggared description. The three large tents, pitched under the shade of the trees, looked white and cool against the dark green. Near us the Raja, with a son and nephew, each with a golden crown (of tinselled paper!) on his head, were mounting a female elephant, gorgeous in state trappings. Round the old female a youngster, born in captivity, was frisking and gambolling about to the extreme discomfiture of the heir to the State *gadi*, who was seated astride the buttcha, his long legs dangling down below the youngster's ears. There was no mahout, as the heir himself occupied this position, and his attempts to keep alike his dignity and his golden crown, whilst every fresh gambol of the playful youngster nearly lost him both, were ludicrous.

From this amusing spectacle one's gaze wandered to the multitude around. The golden scabbarded sword of state of the Raja was carried behind him by a purple and gold-coated gentleman, destitute of nether garments. Close alongside were borne by other similar coated gentry the lighted hookahs of royalty, these being periodically called up and a few puffs taken by the royal lips.

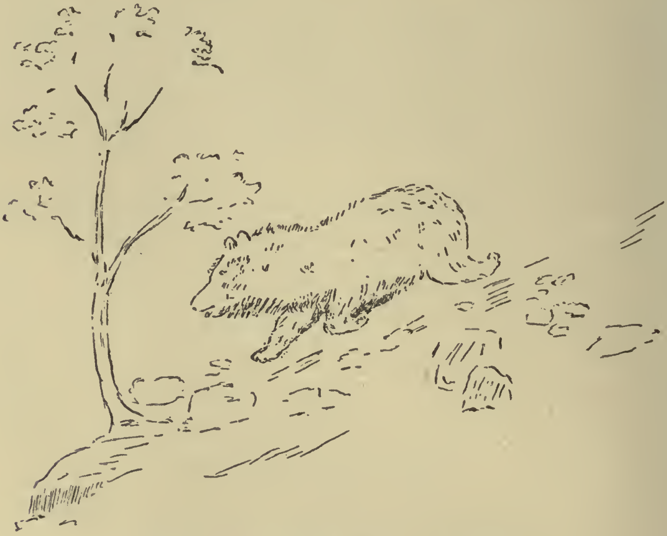
Amongst the Raja's loyal subjects who thronged around, mostly very inadequately attired with a strip of waist-cloth, every conceivable weapon under the sun was represented. Here a Bengali babu was to be seen, dressed in snowy-white muslin, his shirt-tail given to the breeze, and his lower extremities decked in white socks, kept up by suspenders, and patent leather shoes. In his hands he gingerly carried a double-barrelled rifle, and had all the appearance of being extremely uncomfortable under his burden. Cheek by jowl wild jungle wallahs were jostling one another, clothed in a loin-cloth and armed with axe, spear, bow and arrow, or three-pronged trident fork. Others, the shikaris of the community, had ancient firelocks and muskets, and blunderbusses, some looking like small cannon, with here and there a bayonet fixed to the muzzle. Quaint-looking curved swords and daggers and curious spear-heads were visible on all sides—enough to completely glut the antique shops of all London! And yet absurdly out of date as these weapons were, their owners loved them, and trusted to them and could not be induced to part.

Surrounded by this unique assemblage, all in the highest spirits, we started for the machans. Half-way the beaters left us, and at about 1 p.m. we reached the first of the machans. The Raja's staff had taken unusual trouble over these. The sporting sahib is usually content with a small platform fixed to a couple of stout branches of a tree, with a few green branches placed round the sides to serve as a screen. Not so the Raja's people! Each machan had a pointed roof to it, walls at the sides with large windows, and a small door at the bottom through which projected a ladder by which one ascended. The whole thing was built of green boughs. Beautiful leafy bowers these, in one of which the Raja doubtless intended to enjoy his afternoon siesta, what time the incomprehensible sahib-log worried themselves about the shooting.

We tossed for machans to the Raja's discomfiture, for was it not only in the fitness of things that the District Burra Sahib should have the best, and had it not been all so arranged! I, the junior of the party, won the best. A small nullah ran close by it, down which a panther would be certain to try and sneak should there be one in the beat. So I was warned.

I climbed up into my machan with one attendant and settled myself to my satisfaction, and shortly afterwards the beat commenced. Two shots followed one another in rapid succession away to the right. I was all attention, but nothing passed me. I subsequently learnt that these shots were fired by A——. As he was settling down in his machan he heard a rustle, and turning casually he saw a bear stroll out of the jungle. He was so flabbergasted at the unexpected sight that he did not seize his rifle till the animal was some way off, and then missed.

I had sat patiently for some one and a half hours when I heard a pattering rustle, and out walked a fine peacock. Cocking his eye all round, he made up his mind that all was safe and scurried away, passing beneath my machan. As the beaters were now near I thought I might as well have a shot at a bird should one appear at the end of the beat, and so I slipped a shot-cartridge into the second barrel of the smooth-bore. Bitterly did I regret this later. Shortly afterwards I felt a touch on my arm, and turning my head I saw a bear—the first wild bear I had ever seen in its native jungles—bolting past my machan. Had my companion been awake instead of half asleep, he could have warned me of the animal's approach long before it got near the machan. Before I had recovered from my surprise, not only at seeing the animal but also at the marvellously silent manner in which Bruin was getting over the dry leaf-covered ground, it had disappeared into the small nullah. As the bear emerged on the far side I fired the right barrel of the smooth-bore which I had in my hand. It contained a Meade's shell, and Bruin answered to the shot with a



Saw a bear bolting past my machan.

growl, and appeared to climb the rocky hill like a mountain-goat. So excited was I that without a thought I fired my left barrel at him—a charge of No. 4 shot at a bear 50 yards away! Throwing the smooth-bore away, I seized the rifle and blazed off both barrels at the retreating black object as he neared the top of the hill, from 150 to 200 yards away. Needless to say, and for my own future gain, I missed with both barrels. So far as my limited acquaintance with my companion's language enabled me to do so, I understood him to say that the bear was badly hit, and that we should get him. I awaited the termination of the beat in a state of wild excitement, and as soon as permission was accorded I scrambled down from the machan and we commenced a search for blood. A drop or two was found, but that was all, and after the expenditure of much valuable time in deference to the excited wishes of the tyro, for most of the rest must have known that we should never see that bear again, as he was probably only grazed, we went on to beat No. 2.

My feelings will be understood by most sportsmen, and the lesson served me in excellent stead in the future. I learnt one of the first fundamental rules of the sportsman during a beat. Never let your attention flag for a single instant, for if you do, assuredly will you lose what will perhaps be your one good chance of the day.

I secured no bear that day. I had had and lost my chance. Several were bagged, however, and I scored up in my memory for future occasions three facts: the first, that a bear appears to be so much larger an object, and consequently easier to hit, than he is in reality, owing to his thick coat of long hair; the second, that the animal can come down a rocky hill with incredible swiftness, bounding or rather rolling down from rock to rock with a curious rolling gallop like some stout ship in half a gale in the Atlantic ; thirdly, that Bruin can get over dry crackly leaves with a celerity and quietness that has to be seen to be credited.

I have alluded to the other methods of bagging bear—that of waiting for them near their caves, either in the morning or evening, or of beating them out of their caves in the daytime by means of squibs and crackers and tackling them on foot. Most of my experiences in this line have been in the Himalaya, and in some Himalayan sketches I may perhaps deal with this interesting, and at times exciting, sport in the future.

Enough has been said to show that Bruin offers sport of a satisfying nature, and one that often has in it that spicy element of danger which forms the fascination of our shikar outings in the East.

For the naturalist and he who loves to study the habits of jungle animals, the *bhalu* is ever worth watching when one can do it unbeknown to the animal himself. He appears to take life so extremely seriously that his very seriousness has in it an element of farce.

CHAPTER V

Hyæna, jackal, and wild dog—Jackal—Habits—A useful scavenger—Pelt—The hyæna—Distribution and habits—Food—Cowardly nature—Hyæna pugs—Hyæna in a beat—Wild dog—A game-destroyer—Distribution—Methods of hunting game—Immune to poison—Should be shot on sight.

HYÆNA, JACKAL, AND WILD DOG

ALTHOUGH the hyæna (*Hyæna striata*), jackal (*Canis aureus*), and wild dog (*Cyon dukhunensis*) yield no trophies, as the word is commonly accepted amongst sportsmen, a book dealing with the larger animals of India's jungles would scarcely be complete without a mention being made of these common inhabitants of the country's vast waste tracts. Amongst the three the wild dog assumes a pre-eminence, and is known to every shikari, owing to the very large mortality it causes amongst the deer tribes. An area which a pack of this animal is quartering will soon become gameless so far as the more defenceless portion of the animal fauna is concerned, for the timid deer appear to become instinctively aware of the neighbourhood of such a scourge to their peace and happiness, and make haste to leave so dangerous a neighbourhood.

The pelts of all these three animals will probably soon become known to the tyro in search of sport in India's jungles. One, indeed, he will meet long ere he ever sees a jungle, for the jackal we have ever with us; he is equally at home in a great city like Calcutta as he is out in the wild fastnesses of the country.

Little mention need be made of him here. Scavenger he is *par excellence*, and a cowardly scavenger at that. His pelt, thick and of a beautiful rich yellow-red colour, resembling the better type of village *pi* dog, is handsome if taken in the cold weather. When properly cured, a number of their skins can be turned into a not inelegant and most useful carriage-rug.

Next to his scavenging habits the jackal is chiefly known to India's sportsmen as providing a substitute for the fox for the numerous Hunts established all over the country, and many an excellent run have we had for the brush of this fleet-footed beast.

The other two animals I have alluded to differ from the jackal, in that they are not found near the populous abodes of man.

The hyæna or striped hyæna, the *lakkar bagh* of the native of Upper India, is common throughout the country, affecting the hilly, open country, and being comparatively rare in the great forests. He is most abundant perhaps in North-west and Central India. The animal chiefly frequents rocky hills and dark deep ravines, and conceals itself in the daytime in caves or in holes dug by itself. It comes out at night to hunt for its food, which consists chiefly of carrion.

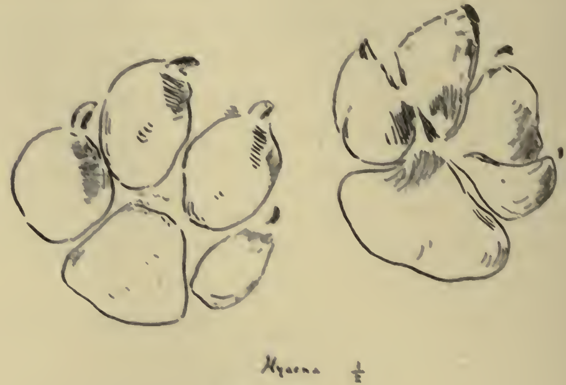
When he gets the chance he will pull down sheep and dogs and goats, but his cowardly nature usually prevents him enjoying these dainties as often as he would like.

The hyæna has rather a handsome striped pelt, grey, with narrow transverse, black or tawny stripes both on body and legs. It stands high in front with a crest and mane, and has extremely powerful jaws and teeth. The animal measures about 3 feet 6 inches, with a tail of 1 foot 6 inches, and weighs 60 to 80 lbs. Its excreta are curious, as they are principally composed of bony fragments which dry into hard balls.

The hyæna's peculiar, harsh, strident laugh is well known to all jungle lovers; but is apt to get on the nerves when one is out in camp by oneself and afflicted with an attack of the blues.

Its pugs as shown here are very like a dog's.

I have often come across this animal in beats. Quite recently two of us were sitting on a forest line hoping for a stag chitul, or sambhar, when my friend suddenly fired two shots. I looked up to my right, and there, jumping down the line towards me, was what I took to be a panther. I fired a barrel at him rather hurriedly, and then a second when he was within 30 yards. The second shot dropped him, and reloading, I slowly advanced. The ride was in deep shadow, as it was still early morning; but surely, I thought, that can't be a leopard. Suddenly the animal half raised himself up, and I saw the gleam of a pair of wicked-looking fangs, a tremendous crest, and two ugly-looking green eyes. It was a hyæna.



Pugs of hyæna.

The wild dog is by no means so widely distributed or so commonly met with as the two animals above described. Nor does he come under the head of a scavenging animal. We all wish he did! Probably not even the native shikari himself commits as much damage to the herbivorous fauna of India, and especially amongst the deer tribe, as does this pest. One has often been tempted to wonder why the animal was ever placed in its position in the scheme of nature.

The *jungli kutta*, as the natives call him in the north, is chiefly confined to the large forest tracts of the country, where he usually roams about in parties and hunts down his quarry. Most sportsmen are familiar with his procedure. On putting up a deer, a few of the pack get on to his tracks and run him hard. Most deer run in circles, and the rest of the pack take a short cut so as to relieve their companions when they are blown. The chase is thus carried on till the wretched deer is at last run into and pulled down. Or if a stag, till he comes to bay in some rocky ravine, where, knee-deep in the stream, he fights his last gallant fight, and probably sends some of his enemies to their happy hunting grounds before following to his own.

The wild dog resembles a village *pi*. He is rusty-red or brownish grey in colour, and has a good pelt in winter. The head, properly set up, makes rather a good trophy.

The animal breeds in winter, the period of gestation being sixty-three days, and their young are sooty-black.

In the mating season the animal is found in pairs, and on other occasions may be occasionally found singly.

Many shikaring men always shoot a wild dog on sight, and there can be little doubt that much more could be done if men only took a little trouble. Poison appears to be perfectly useless. Several officers of the Forest Service in the Central Provinces, have carried out a number of most interesting experiments with strychnine, with the object of lessening the seriously increasing numbers of the animal in that province. They have proved almost if not entirely abortive. The dog, after eating heavily of a poisoned carcass, merely vomits up the whole of his meal, and goes on his nefarious way without further ill effects.

Poison is apparently useless. Therefore I proffer to the true sportsman, as a last word to these notes, the earnest advice: Shoot a wild dog on sight, and, whenever possible, take the trouble to go a little out of your way, if by doing so you get the chance thereby of destroying a litter.

THE END.

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